The Art of Syncrude

by

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Abstract

Combating the current and incoming climate catastrophe demands a reckoning with the forces that continue to prevent meaningful changes to the fossil fuel paradigm. Actors benefitting from the exploitation of fossil fuels have been consistent in their strategic efforts to actively affect policy regarding the exploitation and use of fossil fuels, through managing the public as a lever with which to assert pressure upon the gatekeepers of increased extraction. Similarly, in the geographical contexts where exploitation takes place, the apparent political consensus around energy has been managed. Pratt (1976) demonstrates exhaustively that the fossil fuel industry, at least in the 1960-1976 period, with Syncrude at the helm, drove the energy policies coming out of the Government of Alberta during this time. Urquhart (2018) furthers this line of inquiry demonstrating how, through the cooperation of the government of Alberta, three of the largest universities in Alberta, and the tar sands industry, the development and exploitation of the tar sands in Alberta is promoted. Additionally, Urquhart's "bitumen triangle" responds to acute critiques and incidents harmful to the continued expansion and development of the sands with aesthetically different but substantially similar messages—that the sands are a necessity to our way of life, however defined. This thesis dives into how exactly the industry branch of Urquhart's "bitumen triangle" goes about this messaging campaign. Inspired by the work of Mel Evans (2015), and her theorization of "artwashing," this thesis examines the subtle impact of artistic sponsorship by sands boosters. It is as part of their broader community investment strategy to harness public opinion—especially those opinions of certain key groups— through convincing them that exploiting the sands is necessary. I use Syncrude's artistic sponsorship at one of Edmonton's cultural institutions, the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA), as a central case study to test these and other hypotheses. I have found that although Syncrude's sponsorship at the AGA has been relatively minor in financial contribution, the size and consistency of their logos throughout the AGA is effective in making them seem more essential then their financial contribution suggests. When zooming out however, beyond Edmonton and the AGA, I have found that Syncrude's sponsorship portfolio increases dramatically the closer one looks to their sites of extraction.

Dedication

Have you ever wondered what it takes for colour to exist?
If slowly, the grass were no longer green,
And the sky were to turn a dull grey mist,
How would you teach you kids colours they've never seen?

Using synthetic productions of yellow and blue,
You'd teach them to mix, 'till they got it just right—that nice green hue.
Reaching into history, you'd story, that in the deep distant past,
Grass used to look like that, all summer, it would last.

The snows were not always like this,
It was so white—cold and filled us with a certain bliss.
But us, has never been all;
And now, our just desserts, begin to fall.

Like the orchid that remembers the bee,
I remember what it was to see a great, blue sea.
And like the orchid, I speak for the dead,
Mourning this collective past, we know what we did,
What else can be said.

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Introduction

I began this research by diving into the politics of climate change. One of the difficulties I ran up against attempting to study "climate change" came from its omnipresence—is it a noun or maybe a verb? Possibly an adjective? Indeed, climate change is a complex term, referring to many different phenomena, like energy security, qualities of life, and oil dependence. Climate change is a dynamic: It is a multidirectional flow that changes as the interlinked actions and behaviours of humans (me), other-than-humans (porcupine) and more-than-humans (the river) change too.[1] In the context I live in and around, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, this flow has become deeply affected, and in my view, seriously compromised, due to the development and expansion of the bituminous sands in Northern Alberta. In Alberta, consensus feels apparent; what interests me here is how the oil industry in Alberta has managed to realize this consensus despite the increasingly apparent and damaging costs of this exploitation. Does such a state of affairs warrant Takach's allusion to Alberta as a gang of pirates plundering the earth's bounty?[2] Perhaps, but such a characterization, this thesis suggests, misrepresents the orchestrated fabrication of consensus in Alberta around the topic of bituminous sands development and expansion. While it may be tempting to suggest that the economic importance of the oil industry in Alberta drives this consensus, historical accounts, such as Pratt's described in chapter two, demonstrate that although economic importance has been *a* factor—and certainly continues on as

[1] This way of thinking was solidified for me by listening to Anya Zoledziowski(producer), Rick Harp (producer and host), Candis Callison, Kim TallBear and Ken Williams, "Conversations on the Climate Crisis," *MediaINDIGENA: Indigenous Current Affairs*, Archived August 19, 2019, https://mediaindigena.libsyn.com/ep-174-conversations-on-the-climate-crisis , timestamp: 15 minutes.
[2] Takach does not actually use the word pirate, instead alluding to it (to my mind) by describing how "we continue to treat the natural world as our limitless plunder pit[.]" See Geo Takach, *Tar Wars: Oil, Environment and Alberta's Image*, (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2017), 3.

one—it has not been the only or most important variable. Furthermore, as climate change becomes more blatant and fossil fuels extractions associated with it, economic arguments will hold less water even in locales who profit from it. In line with capitalistic motivations, oil companies will continue to expand into the cultural sector in order to justify their existence. This thesis digs into the weeds of one such expansion into the cultural sector, what I am calling "cultural curation," and the use of "artwashing" as a tactic of corporate public relations strategy to better understand the tangled politics that arguably have allowed acceleration in the face of a brick wall.

The inquiry from which this thesis stems questions the motivations of public support for expanded energy operations. Why do governments, as exemplified by the recently defeated NDP government in Alberta—with, at the very least, implicit public support— explicitly acknowledge that doing so contributes disproportionately to global climate change, yet, continue on in this direction anyways.[3] Cynically, one possible explanation for such a state of affairs is that Albertans are fully aware of the risks climate change poses but coolly know too, as shown by Naomi Klein, that Canada broadly and Alberta especially is well positioned geographically to cope and withstand climate change relatively easily.[4] So, perhaps feverishly extracting oil from the bituminous sands in northern Alberta is a cold and calculated trade-off. I am not quite prepared to presume most Albertans have the information levels necessary to identify such a tradeoff and hope they would simply not make such a deadly tradeoff. Perhaps the more compelling answer then, is that increases in extraction levels of oil and absolute emission levels

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[3] See for example, Andrew Leach, Angela Adams, Stephanie Cairns, Linda Coady and Gordon Lambert, *Climate Leadership Report to the Minister*, (Alberta Government: Report to the Minister, Alberta, 2015), 11.
[4] Naomi Klein, "Paying Our Climate Debt," in *Climate Change—Who's Carrying the Burden?: The Chilly Climates of the Global Environmental Dilemma*, eds. L. Anders Sandberg and Tor Sandberg (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010), 61-62; BBC News, " 'Climate apartheid' between rich and poor looms, UN expert warns," *BBC News* 25 June 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48755154 .

are a case in point of the collective action problem at the heart of climate change. Such an answer finds explicit support from Leach et al., in their *Report to the Minister* explaining to NDP environment minister at the time, Shannon Philips, that to make energy policies in Alberta consistent with the Paris Climate Accord would impose "a significant cost to the province due to lost competitiveness… [and so, i]n the meantime, imposing policies in Alberta that are more stringent than what we have suggested is not tenable, until our peer and competitor jurisdictions adopt policies that would have comparable impact on their industrial sectors."[5] To follow Leach et al. is however flawed, though certainly illuminating, for their analysis presumes oil to be a historically and contemporarily neutral commodity. The undertone of Leach et al's comments is that '*we*' all benefit from a competitive oil industry; that '*we*' lose something if oil development is in some way restricted. Such a 'we' goes far in demonstrating the proximity with which the Alberta government understands itself as a part of the oil industry in Alberta. How, this thesis asks, has the oil industry in Alberta managed to convince governments, and moreover, large cohorts of the Alberta public, that what benefits the bottom line of largely foreign-owned transnational oil corporations somehow benefits the Alberta public in a meaningful way? My hypothesis, drawn from the theoretical and empirical literatures examining corporate artistic sponsorship, is that through artistic, cultural and community sponsorships, oil corporations in Alberta seek to shape public opinion such that these sponsored events, programs and art exhibitions are perceived as impossible without the support of oil money. These sponsorships intend to establish oil as necessary and vital to a community's cultural welfare.

The _ _ _ Sands: What are they and what to call them?

[5] Leach et al., *Climate Leadership Report to the Minister*, 11.

The sands in Alberta, "[b]uried beneath the northeastern, boreal-forested expanse of the province"[6] cover a total area of 142,000 square kilometers in the Athabasca, Cold Lake and Peace River regions.[7] In terms of the scope of the sands, "[u]sing currently available technology and under the current economic conditions, there are 165 billion barrels of remaining established reserves in the oil sands deposits of Northern Alberta. An additional 250 billion barrels could potentially be recovered with more favorable economic conditions or new technology to extract and process."[8] Two processes have been used to separate the bitumen from the sand, surface mining and *in situ*. "Surface mining uses truck and shovel technology to move sand saturated with bitumen from the mining area to an extraction facility. Surface mining is used to recover oil sands deposits less than 75 metres below the surface, while in-situ technologies are used to recover deeper deposits."[9] "Approximately 80% of oil sands are recovered through in-situ production."[10] There are various in situ, which literally means "in place," methods but in Alberta a process known as steam assisted gravity drainage (SAGD) is most popular.[11] SAGD expert Neil Edmunds explains: "Think of a big block of wax the size of a building, then take a steam hose and tunnel your way in and melt all the wax above. It will drain to the bottom where it can be collected. That's what SAGD does to bitumen."[12] As Nikiforuk reminds us, however, "SAGD can also kill the living heart of a forest. A typical project occupies a three-mile by three-mile area and destroys 7 per cent of the land. But the technology's supporting roads, pipelines, and seismic

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[6] Takach, 3
[7] Government of Alberta, "Oil Sands Facts and Statistics," last accessed June 21 2019, https://www.alberta.ca/oil-sands-facts-and-statistics.aspx .
[8] Government of Alberta, "Oil Sands 101," last accessed June 21 2019, https://www.alberta.ca/oil-sands-101.aspx .
[9] Government of Alberta, "Oil Sands 101," last accessed June 21 2019, https://www.alberta.ca/oil-sands-101.aspx .
[10] https://www.alberta.ca/oil-sands-101.aspx
[11] Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands*: *Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent,* revised and updated, (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books D&M Publishing, 2010) 15.
[12] Neil Edmunds in Nikiforuk, 15. (Nikiforuk doesn't provide a citation of Brenner other than citing his name on page 15).

lines industrialize the forest so irresolutely that it makes the land inhospitable for much wildlife."[13] Moreover, while SAGD is far less visibly destructive than open pit mining, "it still disturbs land, requires even more energy, generates more sulfur dioxide and greenhouse gases, and poses a serious risk to underground aquifers."[14] The energy appetite of SAGD is so great relative to its output, that a federal report in 2008 unearthed by Nikiforuk revealed that "industry burned up a joule of energy only to produce but a paltry 1.4 joules of evergy [sic] as gasoline in the SAGD projects."[15]

As Takach summarizes: "The project has become so contentious that even its name is disputed. Long-standing residents often use "tar sands," as do prominent critics of the project, while the Government of Alberta and the oil industry adopted the cleaner-sounding "oil sands" after extraction began commercially in the 1960s. Proponents of development and/or status quo duly followed suit."[16] Indeed, on the Government of Alberta's website explaining the history of the sands, they justify their usage of 'oil sands' arguing that "[i]n the early days of discovery, oil sands were incorrectly referred to as tar sands. One of their first uses was for roofing or road paving, but since the sand will not harden, the practice ended." As they explain further, "oil sand is a naturally occurring petrochemical that can be upgraded into crude oil and other petroleum products. At room temperature it is a grainy version of cold molasses. Tar is synthetically produced from coal, wood, petroleum or peat through destructive distillation. It is generally used to seal against moisture. It must be heated to be used."[17] Differently, Urquhart suggests that 'tar

[13] Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands,* 15.
[14] Richard Schneider and Simon Dyer, *Death by a Thousands Cuts: Impacts of In Situ Oil Sands Development on Alberta's Boreal Forest,* (Pembina Institute, 2006) quoted in Takach, *Dirty Oil*, 7.
[15] Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands*, 16.
[16] Takach, 3.
[17] Government of Alberta, "Oil Sands – Overview," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.alberta.ca/oil-sands-overview.aspx

sands' is actually a more accurate physical description of the sands, whereas 'oil sands' is "the salesperson's preferred phrase."[18] As I agree with Urquhart, and many others opting for this same choice, I follow in describing these sands as *tar sands.* Innovatively, Takach hopes to skirt this issue through refusing both names and insists upon "bit-sands,"[19] short for bituminous-sands. However, I find Takach's naming problematic as it suggests both names are more-or-less valid when this is certainly not the case as the use of "oil sands" versus "tar sands" quite clearly diminishes the 'dirtiness' of the product—an image drawn from the fact that "[e]ach barrel of bitumen produces three times as much green-house gas as a barrel of conventional oil[;] [e]ach barrel requires the consumption of three barrels of fresh water…[translating to] [i]ndustry in the tar sands us[ing] as much water every year as a city of two million people[, of which n]inety per cent of this water ends up in the world's largest impoundments of toxic waste: the tailings ponds… [which] leak or seep into groundwater."[20] The use of the term 'oil sands' is therefore intentionally misleading so as to benefit "boosters" of the resource. Similarly problematic is the use of the term "bit sands" for it obfuscates the true character of the tar sands.

Method

I base this work on a literature which argues that corporate sponsorship of art is based on the need to build and maintain public support. As a rule, this literature argues that art sponsorship is an extension of corporations' broader public relations campaigns.[21] Further, it suggests that museums are sites where public opinion is made manifest,[22] and therefore, are useful as a proxy

[18] Ian Urquhart, *Costly Fix: Power, Politics and Nature in the Tar Sands,* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 32.
[19] Takach, 4.
[20] Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands*, 3.
[21] Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts,* (London, U.K.: Pluto Press, 2015), 89.
[22] Evans, 19.

for public opinion. Furthermore, museums have become increasingly contested sites in the last thirty years in Canada due to decreased public funding and a resulting increased reliance on corporate philanthropy. For these reasons grounded in the literature, combined with the logistical and positional argument related to my living and working in Edmonton, the case study of this thesis is the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA) located in Edmonton. Looking to the AGA, I ask whether one oil conglomerate operating in the sands in northern Alberta, Syncrude, uses sponsorship at the AGA in an attempt to curate broader public opinion that is favorable to their interests. Historically, in the context of other similarly socially marginalized products—produced, for example, by the tobacco and armament industries—a feeling was created that while the sponsorship was indeed problematic, such was the inevitable price paid for a thriving arts community.[23] It was necessary. As has been shown, while this sentiment was certainly prevalent, it proved empirically unfounded. Tobacco and armament sponsorships of arts were banned in many countries and the sponsors that replaced them actually exceeded the original sponsorship commitment measured in dollar figures.[24] This seemingly hopeful story is tinged with caution because many of the sponsors that replaced tobacco sponsors were oil corporations.[25] Thus, caution is certainly justified in the historical lesson of tobacco and armament corporations. Such a historical lesson should drive the expectation that a ban on oil sponsorship might only lead to sponsorship moving from one socially marginalized industry to another.

[23] Evans, 62, 70, 166.
[24] Evans, 21-23.
[25] Evans, 20, See for example, BP succeeding Imperial Tobacco as the sponsor of the Portrait Award in 1989, Evans, 20; Ferrari taking sponsorship from Shell after losing Tobacco, Evans, 22.

In order to get at some of the answers to the questions I raise here, I have read, analyzed and compared AGA annual reports—in recent years, self-titled as "Reports to the Community."[26] These reports were not easily accessible through libraries, and as such, contacting the AGA became necessary. Reports from 2012-2017 are available online,[27] reports between and including 1982-1988 as well as the 1992 edition, are available in libraries,[28] but from the late 1980s until 2012, with few exceptions, reports were only available at the AGA collections office. The time period my research covers is therefore 1982 to 2017. This time period was chosen simply due to availability of annual reports. As such the primary method for data collection in this project was to read, analyze, and compare the AGA reports I eventually gained access to in person at the AGA.

Thesis Road Map

Chapter one establishes that through a cooperative effort, the tar sands industry, three major universities in Alberta and the Government of Alberta have collaboratively responded to critiques of the tar sands by "soothing the public with better environmental communications, not better environmental policy."[29] Chapter one argues that most oil corporations are properly understood as very much concerned with public relations and their public image. As such, they hope to affect, at least, a subset of the public through artistic sponsorship. This thesis will attempt to study this phenomenon, introduced in chapter 1 as "artwashing," as it has occurred at the AGA through Syncrude sponsorship from 1982-2017.

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[26]For example, see Art Gallery of Alberta, "Annual Reports," last accessed August 12, 2019, https://www.youraga.ca/about-aga/aga-society/annual-reports .
[27] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Annual Reports," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.youraga.ca/about-aga/aga-society/annual-reports .
[28] University of Alberta, "Libraries- Annual Report of the Edmonton Art Gallery," last accessed July 1 2019, https://search.library.ualberta.ca/catalog/798503 .
[29] Urquhart, 225.

Chapter two demonstrates Syncrude's longstanding significance in Alberta energy policy since its negotiations with the Lougheed Alberta government in the early 1970s. Chapter 2 shows, contrary to the presentation of the agreement at the time—as on the 'government's terms'—that Syncrude has actively, though with differing levels of government support, driven much of the policy developments relating to the tar sands since the early 1970s. In doing so, Syncrude reveals their willingness, and ability, to use the public as a lever with which they can pressure governments. Such a will and ability serves as my foundation to expect Syncrude to pursue avenues including artistic sponsorship as part of their broader public relations campaign.

Chapter three examines the theoretical literature as well as some empirical examples of oil corporations explicitly claiming to use sponsorship to purchase some kind of "cultural capital" through "artwashing." Chapter three serves as the theoretical base from which my expectations are built for my own findings in chapter four.

Chapter four reports my findings from researching at the AGA. Corresponding to the literature, I expect (1) to find a base level of sponsorship from Syncrude to the AGA that changes along with incidents harmful to Syncrude's broader image; (2) to find that Syncrude's sponsorship is focused disproportionately on artists located proximally to the tar sands in Northern Alberta; (3) to find that Syncrude's sponsorship is focused disproportionately on content—like the boreal forest, for example— local to their operations in Northern Alberta. Surprisingly, I find no evidence of (1) as Syncrude's sponsorship has remained relatively static in the years studied. I fail to reject expectations (2) and (3), and find that in general, beyond only their AGA sponsorship, Syncrude's sponsorship of cultural and community events (beyond only art), increases quite dramatically as the areas examined approach the Fort McMurray – Wood Buffalo regions (the closest municipalities to the tar sands in which Syncrude operates).[30]

[30] Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .

Chapter 1

Introduction

I grew up in Alberta and excluding a few years abroad, I have lived here most of my life. During my elementary school years, I was taught about the three R's: Reduce, Re-use, and Recycle—if somehow, you have forgotten this gospel. Through the three R's, I was taught to appreciate my environment. Such an education fostered a confusing understanding of the world for myself as a young Albertan: On the one hand, I became increasingly aware of climate change, and how it is something that ought to be avoided, and therefore, thought of it as something that, through personal actions such as following the three Rs, should be addressed. On the other hand, as I grew up and began to develop some curiosity, I noticed that much of Alberta's wealth and prosperity is tied to the 'success' of oil. Indeed, I soon learnt that high oil prices were 'good' for Alberta and low ones 'bad'; that more oil production, and with it, more emissions and damages to the land, was 'good' for Alberta. Eventually I began to notice that much of Alberta's material success depends on an industry that is responsible for a very significant proportion of global warming (around two thirds).[1] It therefore became clear to me that a trade-off exists for Alberta: material wealth through tar sands extractions versus contributing to mitigating climate change which demands a reduction in extraction. Such a dichotomous understanding may be limited and likely over simplified, yet it is clear that the Alberta government and the Federal Canadian government, along with oil industry actors, believe or at least, try to convince the public, that this trade-off is imaginary.[2] In this thesis, I

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[1] Evans, 11.

[2] During the Notley administration, the "Keep Canada Working" advertisement campaign advanced such an argument. See https://web.archive.org/web/20190523133859/https://keepcanadaworking.ca/ . Since the election of the UCP in Alberta, the website has been taken down and replaced with https://yestotmx.ca/, which takes the pro-pipeline pro-development position as consensus whereas Notley attempted to build a consensus, the UCP is

examine one prong of a tar sands corporation's (Syncrude's) response to this criticism: through the phenomenon of "artwashing."[3] This chapter's structure is as follows. First, it begins reviewing Urquhart's recent work on the alliance present in Alberta responsible for curtailing and controlling public opinion in the face of popular critiques of the tar sands. Second, I show that while Alberta's manifestation of pro-oil influence is unique, there is a broader history of the oil industry seeking to participate in the public realm to maximize their own interests, of which, Alberta is a part. Finally, this chapter concludes with what will be the core of this thesis—a phenomenon known as 'artwashing,' which describes a process of using arts sponsorship to influence public opinion in a favourable way for the 'washer.'

The Bitumen Triangle

Urquhart deploys his conceptual device, known as the 'the bitumen triangle,'[4] to make sense of the peculiar historical and ongoing dynamic that exists between the Albertan government, three universities within Alberta (Universities of Lethbridge, Calgary and Alberta) and the principal oil corporations separating bitumen from sand in the northern part of the province.[5] Urquhart argues that "the state and [oil] industry forged a bitumen triangle aimed at soothing the public with better environmental communications, not better environmental policy."[6] This thesis expands on Urquhart's assertion by asking whether Syncrude—a long time

asserting already exists. For a comparison, see Madeline Smith, "Keep Canada Working VS Yes to TMX: How the NDP and UCP pipeline ad campaigns compare," *The Star Calgary*, June 1, 2019. Available online at https://www.thestar.com/calgary/2019/06/01/keep-canada-working-vs-yes-to-tmx-how-the-ndp-and-ucp-pipeline-ad-campaigns-compare.html .

[3] Evans, *Artwash.*

[4] Urquhart, 208.

[5] Urquhart, 33.

[6] Urquhart, 225.

powerful corporate consortium operating in the northern Albertan tar sands— employs arts funding and artistic sponsorship to aid in its broader public relations campaign.

The public relations campaign that Urquhart describes is importantly different from corporate lobbying. The distinction I will draw is that lobbying seeks something out *from* government *for* the corporation. Public relations campaigns in the bitumen triangle context, however, target the general public. They involve coordinating government, industry, and academia in an effort to at once defend fossil fuel interests from environmental critiques and improve or gain some kind of public consent, or at least, favourable public perception, regarding the extraction of oil.

The Triangle in Action

In late April 2008, following a surprise snowstorm in the Fort McMurray region and surrounding tar sands operations, 1,606 ducks sought refuge onto what they thought was an inviting lake. Tragically, what they mistook for a lake, was "instead, the toxic, bitumen-infused waters of Syncrude's Aurora Settling Basin…[a] mat of bitumen, "several inches thick, viscous and cohesive with the consistency of a frothy roofing tar,"[7] that trapped the waterfowl and dragged them to the bottom of the pond."[8] Syncrude and the government of Alberta both insisted that the incident was one of a kind and largely due to uncommon weather. In the subsequent prosecution of Syncrude for this incident, Justice K. E. Tjosvold found "no evidence of a methodical or comprehensive system of monitoring to produce a thorough census,"[9] and therefore, found no evidence that this incident was in fact one of a kind. Moreover, other tar

[7] *R. v. Syncrude Canada Ltd.,* 2010 ABPC 229, para 2 quoted in Urquhart, 206.
[8] Urquhart, 205-206.
[9] *R. v. Syncrude Canada Ltd.,* [2010], ABPC 229, para 34 quoted in Urquhart, 207.

sands companies had no comparable incident for their methods of prevention were already in place prior to April that year, further solidifying the perspective that this particular incident was due to Syncrude's negligence.[10] As Urquhart notes, this incident was of particular interest to the Alberta government, and many tar sands companies, certainly including Syncrude, because at the same time Alberta's Deputy Premier Ron Stevens was in Washington, D.C., making the case to American legislators that Canadian oil (from the tar sands) has a "wonderful" story to tell in contrast to the "environmentally irresponsible" oil stories coming from outside of Canada about Canadian oil developments.[11] Suffice it to say, from the triangle's point of view, the duck incident did not help them promote their product internationally.

The response from the triangle in this case was impressive. Syncrude published full page advertisements apologizing for killing the ducks and promised to do better on this front and promised "to meet the public's expectations regarding the 'responsible development' of the oil sands."[12] Furthermore, the industry began to suggest that the media's portrayal of them was unfair and the governments seem to have agreed:

> In April 2009, Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Government of Alberta, and CAPP [(the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers)] partnered to hold two days of meetings and outreach in Washington DC. The roundtable portion of the program 'examined oil sands in the United States context and *how best to address the increasingly negative portrayal of Canada's industry, both in political circles and in the public arena, through the use of coordinated engagement*.'[13]

[10] Urquhart, 207
[11] Urquhart, 206.
[12] Lisa Arrowsmith, "Oil Sands Giant Says 'Sorry' for Dead Ducks," *Globe and* Mail, May 3, 2008 paraphrased by Urquhart, 208.
[13] Ken England, email message to Elain Feldman, May 6 2000. This email message was contained in Greenpeace Canada, "ATIP—Notes of April 23 CAPP-DFAIT Workshop," https://docs.google.com/a/ualberta.ca/file/d/oB_oMqnZ4wmcMWTNjOTcxMUh2doo/edit?pli=I , quoted in Urquhart, 208, emphasis added.

In fact, as Takach argues, the duck incident prompted the Alberta government's "communications arms, the Public Affairs Bureau (PAB)"[14] to try to improve Alberta's domestic and international image by spending millions of dollars to "re-brand" the province.[15] While the provincial government was active domestically and somewhat active internationally, as Takach notes, the federal government was also active: "As in Alberta, federal proponents of the bit[uminous]-sands viewed *their primary problem as one of public relations rather than environmental protection*."[16] Shortly following the governments' largely unsuccessful attempts at (re)branding, the oil industry stepped onto the scene more forcefully: In 2010, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) launched its online video campaign titled *Canada's Oil Sands: Come See for Yourself* (2010) because, as CAPP's media-relations expert said reflecting on this video in 2012, it was created to fight the fact that "people don't trust us."[17] Moreover, the 2013 annual report of one of Syncrude's owners at the time, the *Canadian Oil Sands Trust*—that was hostilely taken over by Suncor in 2016[18]—describes plainly the extent to which public perception is a significant risk to tar sands profitability because it can result in (a) increased environmental regulation; (b) place firm limits on production; and (c) reduce pipelines.[19]

Two years following the duck incident, in 2010, the bitumen triangle is completed with the addition of Dr. David Lynch, dean of engineering at the University of Alberta. In a CAPP

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[14] Takach, 57
[15] Takach, 57- 62.
[16] Takach, 76.
[17] Takach 77, quoting Travis Davies (2012) discussing their role as CAPP's first media relations hire, footnote 159, but there is no full citation beyond Davies (2012).
[18] Tracy Johnson, "Suncor and COS: The art of the Hostile Takeover," *CBC News*, December 22, 2015, https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/suncor-cos-hostile-rhetiric-1.3371801 .
[19] Canadian Oil Sands Limited, "Investing In Tomorrow: Annual Report, 2013," 39, https://www.sedar.com/GetFile.do?lang=EN&docClass=2&issuerNo=00030953&issuerType=03&projectNo=02179348&docId=3498110 .

sponsored television advertisement, Lynch explains how "new ideas are making a difference," and how exciting it is to have over 1,000 researchers at the University of Alberta working on a single project—"the responsible development of the oil sands."[20] Lynch, in this case, was echoing a message that had already begun being made by the "Canada School of Energy and Environment (CSEE), a non-profit corporation established in 2008 as a partnership between the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge… collab[orating] and shar[ing] information with a goal of furthering "investment in energy innovation to ensure an abundant supply of environmentally responsible energy for the continuing prosperity and social well-being of Canadians.""[21] As Dr. David Keith—unsuccessfully recruited by the University of Calgary to be an academic leader of the CSEE in 2011—suggests, the CSEE "worked to muzzle a debate about energy and climate change[.]"[22] As Keith recounts, soon after Carson became executive director of the CSEE, he used "his academic post to further the interests of the conservative government and a narrow segment of the petroleum sector."[23] Further, while director of the CSEE, Carson "also co-chaired the non-profit Energy Policy Institute of Canada (EPIC) whose goal it was to build 'public sensitivity'[24] to the bituminous sands."[25] Urquhart goes on to meticulously document extensions of this and other cases to demonstrate the consistency with which both provincial and federal levels of government, the universities of Lethbridge, Calgary and Alberta,

[20] Once public, now private, Urquhart refers to Dr. David Lynch, P. Eng., Dean of Engineering at University of Alberta, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVelcaGxUHU (uploaded June 12, 2011) quoted in Urquhart, 210.
[21] Urquhart, 210-211, and the quote in a quote is coming from footnote 60.
[22] David Keith, "The Real Bruce Carson Scandal," https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/09/22/the-real-bruce-carson-scandal.html in Urquhart, 211.
[23] David Keith, "The Real Bruce Carson Scandal," https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/09/22/the-real-bruce-carson-scandal.html.
[24] RCMP, *Information to Obtain a Production Order, 7,* quoted in Urquhart, 213.
[25] Urquhart, 213.

and the oil industry in Alberta work together cohesively and collaboratively to promote a healthy image of tar sands exploitation.

Beyond communications however, Urquhart makes plain the institutional structure that government has created to preserve the interests of the fossil fuel companies in Alberta. Following the duck incident in 2008, it became more difficult for organizations, like the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition, to have governments accept their statements of concern about how, for instance, "Syncrude proposed to manage the tons of tailings produced by its Mildred Lake mining operation."[26] In *Pembina Institute v. Alberta*, Justice R. P. Marceau ruled against the provincial government because he found the "government determined the eligibility to file a statement of concern according to whether the actor was cooperative or had published negative media about the oil sands."[27] This decision did not dissuade the government from ultimately denying Pembina the ability to file a statement of concern; it also illustrates how the government attempted to minimize critique of tar sands extraction. Urquhart continues on into the weeds of the institutional structure of the provincial government finding that over time things become "increasingly inhospitable…to those with environmental concerns about the tar sands."[28] The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER)—the body responsible for regulating energy in Alberta—is an especially problematic institution as it now self-reviews all of its decisions whereas previously its decisions were reviewed by a quasi-judicial and independent agency. Furthermore, its commissioners are appointed by the provincial cabinet;[29] and, as ecologist Kevin Timoney

[26] Urquhart, 220.
[27] *Pembina Institute v. Alberta (Environment and Sustainable Resource Development),* 12 quoted in Urquhart, 221.
[28] Urquhart, 221.
[29] Urquhart, 222.

reports, the AER is dramatically skewing scientific reporting regarding the efficiency and efficacy of cleaning up oil spills.[30]

Federally, the Harper government was as keen as its provincial counterpart: In 2012, Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) minister, Joe Oliver, claimed that "environmental and other radical groups, [threaten] to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical agenda."[31] Using such tactics to deploy political cover, the federal government then repealed the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. With this change, and minister Oliver's changes to the *National Energy Board Act*, the government did not have to address statements of concern regarding any application going to the National Energy Board (the body that has sole jurisdiction over interprovincial and international pipelines) unless the person concerned could demonstrate they were "directly affected."[32] Further significant changes were made when the federal government exempted *in situ* tar sands operations from mandatory environmental assessments,[33]which presently represent 90% of tar sands production.[34] Urquhart therefore concludes with authority that "the state and industry [have] forged a bitumen triangle aimed at soothing the public with better environmental communications, *not* better environmental policy."[35]

Same, Same, but Different?

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[30] Kevin Timoney, "Never Assume Malpractice when Incompetence Will Do: An Overview of Energy Industry Spills in Alberta," (presentation, Alberta Wilderness Association, Edmonton, AB, January 15, 2018).
[31] Natural Resources Canada, "An Open Letter from the Honourable Joe Oliver, Minister of Natural Resources, on Canada's Commitment to Diversity Our Energy Markets and the Need to further Streamline the Regulatory Process in Order to Advance Canada's National Economic Interests" last modified January 9, 2012, http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/media-room/news-release/2012/1/1909 quoted in Urquhart, 223.
[32] Urquhart, 223.
[33] Urquhart, 224.
[34] Kevin P. Timoney, *Impaired Wetlands in a Damaged Landscape: The Legacy of Bitumen Exploitation in Canada,* (Switzerland, Springer Publishing International, 2015), 4.
[35] Urquhart, 225, emphasis added.

In light of the fact that both provincial and federal government administrations have changed since the years I have written about so far, have policy changes perhaps replaced communication strategies? As Urquhart's ninth chapter's subtitle makes clear, "New Government, Same Approach," the answer appears to be "no." The Notley government's *Climate Leadership: Report to Minister* "didn't demand any reductions in [Green House Gas] emissions from the tar sands."[36] The J. Trudeau government, despite having been critical of the Harper government's climate change targets, ultimately accepted them.[37] Provincially, the Notley government has been very explicit in their plan that unless other countries lead, Alberta would certainly not. In their *Report to Minister* from which the *Climate Leadership Plan* is largely derived, Leach et al. write that:

> Many will look at these emissions reductions [referring to the proposed plan of emissions reductions] and claim that our policies will not place Alberta on a trajectory consistent with global 2°C goals [referring here to the Paris Climate Agreement], and in some sense this is true – the policies proposed for Alberta in this document would not, if applied in all jurisdictions in the world, lead to global goals being accomplished. However, more stringent policies in Alberta would come at significant cost to the province due to lost competitiveness, with negligible impact on global emissions due to carbon leakage. As a panel, we have looked at this challenge and concluded that while we do not have an architecture that, in the short-term, will be consistent with meeting global goals, the approach we are proposing will position Alberta to make a meaningful contribution in the longer-term. In the meantime, imposing policies in Alberta that are more stringent than what we have suggested is not tenable, until our peer and competitor jurisdictions adopt policies that would have comparable impact on their industrial sectors.[38]

There is much worthy of critique in this quote—for example, what exactly is the 'longer-term,' and the notion that other oil-centric economies have the 'architecture' to meet the global climate goal while we do not is absurd. However, its place in this paper is to simply show that, as

[36] Urquhart, 282.
[37] Urquhart, 283.
[38] Leach et al., 11.

Urquhart suggested, there is no reason to doubt the strength of the bitumen triangle despite changes in government administrations at the federal and provincial levels.

In 2016, the Canadian government signed and ratified the United Nations' Paris Agreement on Climate Change (alluded to by Leach et al.) which established a goal to limit global average temperature changes from pre-industrial levels to a *maximum* of 2°C.[39] The Paris Agreement, if it demands anything, demands a set of actions, that if replicated in all jurisdictions in the world, would result in limiting global average temperature changes to 2°C. This is the 'bar' for success in the context of the Paris Agreement that Alberta, and relatedly, Canada, are not on track to help meet. Importantly, the Paris Agreement must not be understood as an equitable, fair or even proportional agreement. In the first place, when considering all jurisdictions, the Paris Agreement is unfair to jurisdictions which have (a) not contributed as many GHGs over time as other countries; and/or (b) not benefitted from the spoils of GHG emissions as much as others;[40] and (c) unfair to those countries who have had sectors of industrial labour and often therefore, environmentally taxing labour, outsourced *into* their jurisdictions.[41] Second, the causes of climate change are not equally distributed,[42] yet, in accordance with the Paris Agreement, mitigating climate change appears to demand a more-or-less equal, and therefore disproportionate, distribution of GHG reductions.[43] In terms of causes, as Naomi Klein and others detail, the citizenry and governments of the Global North have benefitted disproportionately from industrial pollution and the large consumption of hydrocarbons (indicative in global income disparities). Additionally, and still more troublingly,

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[39] United Nations, "Paris Agreement,", Article 2, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf.
[40] Naomi Klein, 55-60.
[41] Anthony Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change*, 2nd Edition fully revised and updated, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 93.
[42] Naomi Klein, 55-60.
[43] United Nations, "Paris Agreement," Article 2, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

the Global North will also suffer less of the consequences of global warming.[44] Unfortunately, while the unequal distribution of global warming's causes and effects is relatively agreed upon within the academy, governments continue to obfuscate such facts.[45] Further still, there exists a disparity regarding what are known as "luxury" versus "survival" emissions. As Klein notes, the use of GHG emissions in different jurisdictions are used for different things. In much of the Global North, for example, emissions are used for things like air conditioning a home, for a third car, or to make money— these are what are known as 'luxury emissions.' On the other hand, in jurisdictions, typically found in the Global South, and, those of India and China, huge amounts of GHG emissions are used, but for reasons tied to what in the Global North, we would surely call 'basic,' or 'necessary,' such as, to use Klein's example, the electrification of rural Indian villages.[46]

Oil Corporations and the Need for Public Relations

The duck incident previously discussed, and its associated PR campaign was not a new strategy for the fossil fuel industry. As Taft details, oil companies have engaged in, at times, very explicit counter-factual PR campaigns. For example, James F. Black was "[p]erhaps the first scientist inside the petroleum industry to study global warming"[47] beginning in the 1960s. In 1977 and 1978, "Black informed officials at Exxon headquarters that there was 'general scientific agreement' that the global climate was warming because of emissions from the burning of fossil fuels."[48] In 1978, Black wrote to company officials that "[p]resent thinking holds that

[44] Naomi Klein, 61.
[45] Leach et al., 11; Katherine Hayhoe and Shannon Phillips, "The Science and Politics of Alberta's Changing Climate," (Public Presentation, Edmonton, AB, March 5, 2018).
[46] Naomi Klein, 58.
[47] Kevin Taft, "Oil's Deep State: How the Petroleum Industry Undermines Democracy and Stops Action on Global Warming—in Alberta, and in Ottawa," (Toronto: Ontario, 2017), 51.
[48] Taft, 52.

man [sic] has a time window of five to ten years before the need for hard decisions regarding changes in energy strategies might become critical."[49] Initially, Exxon and later, Shell, took Black and other scientists' warning seriously. In 1982, however, oil companies began to play down the significance of the climate change threat. For example, in an internal report published by Exxon's "Coordination and Planning Division,"[50]Exxon management is assured that "this problem is not as significant to mankind as a nuclear holocaust or world famine."[51] This Exxon report (only published broadly 30 years later due to legal investigations)[52] repeatedly diagnoses the solution to climate change: a reduction in absolute green house gas levels, stating that "“[m]itigation of the 'greenhouse effect' would require major reductions in fossil fuel combustion.”"[53] In 1983, as Taft describes in light of this report, the industry's mood begins to change and their 'back-pedaling' campaign began. In 1989, the George C. Marshall Institute, funded by the tobacco, defence and fossil fuel industries, combined with the Global Climate Coalition which included "Exxon, Shell, BP, Chevron, the American Petroleum Institute, the National Coal Association…and many others[,]"[54]to actively and, in the end, successfully, lobby the American government to water-down, first, the Rio summit and second, to convince then US President Clinton not to ratify the Kyoto protocol. In 1998, a leaked memo of the American Petroleum Institute secured by the *New York Times* demonstrated that the explicit strategy of the

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[49] Taft, 52.
[50]Coordination and Planning Division, Exxon Research and Engineering Company, "CO2 Greenhouse Effect, A Technical Review," April 1, 1982, last accessed March 20, 2017 https://insideclimatenews.org/sites/default/files/documents/1982%20Exxon%20Primer%20on%20CO2%20Greenhouse%20Effect.pdf, 4,5, 12, 19, 20, 21, quoted in Taft, 66.
[51] Coordination and Planning Division, Exxon Research and Engineering Company, "CO2 Greenhouse Effect, A Technical Review," April 1, 1982, last accessed March 20, 2017 https://insideclimatenews.org/sites/default/files/documents/1982%20Exxon%20Primer%20on%20CO2%20Greenhouse%20Effect.pdf, 4,5, 12, 19, 20, 21, quoted in Taft, 67.
[52] *Conservation Law Foundation Inc. V. ExxonMobil,* Massachusetts District Court, Case No. 1:16-cv-11950, filed September 29, 2016, https://www.clf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CLF-v.-ExxonMobil-Complaint.pdf, quoted in Taft, 66.
[53] Taft, 67.
[54] Taft, 68-69.

fossil fuel industry was to create distrust and sow doubt as to the merit of climate change science. As Taft describes, "[t]he strategies and tactics of the plan included recruiting scientists 'who do not have a long history…in the climate change debate' to use as commentators sowing doubt on the global warming science. They would be supported by media information kits and orchestrated campaigns producing 'steady streams' of letters-to-the-editor, op-ed columns, workshops, and paid advertising on 'scientific uncertainties.'" And as Taft appropriately describes, "this was only the beginning."[55] Thus, while the bitumen triangle may be the Albertan manifestation of a responsive public relations campaign, strategies resembling what Urquhart describes have a history of being used by Syncrude's ownership (because Exxon, now ExxonMobil, owns Imperial Oil and Imperial presently owns a 25% stake in Syncrude).[56]

Thus far I have tried to establish, following Urquhart, that through the bitumen triangle, environmental critiques and concerns are answered with bitumen-triangle sponsored public relations campaigns. Those campaigns insist that the environmental critique is misplaced, despite strong evidence to the contrary. Importantly, these responses do not involve substantive policy changes despite Canadian rhetorical and symbolic commitment to the Paris Agreement struck in 2016.[57] There is therefore a great need for academic, social and political engagement to resist the bitumen triangle to the extent to which we believe Alberta should participate at least proportionately in mitigating global climate change—not simply respond to critiques with public relations campaigns. How these public relations campaigns operate is therefore relevant to understanding the politics of climate change. While clearly these public relations campaigns involve numerous actors with different and overlapping interests, to address all of them is

[55] Taft, 70.
[56] Syncrude, "Ownership & Investors," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/our-company/ownership-and-investors/
[57] Urquhart, 282.

beyond the scope of this work. As such, my focus is restricted to the industry side of the triangle and specifically, how corporations entice communities, or the institutions of the arts such as galleries and museums, into squaring the bitumen triangle and becoming a *de facto* fourth component. My particular focus examines how the arts community, proxied through the AGA, is used by Syncrude to fulfill an "artwashing" function as part of its broader community investment strategy. "Artwashing" is a process where art is used to shape, disrupt or in some way alter public relations. It manifests itself as sponsoring key artistic exhibitions and programming. Note that Syncrude spends around six million dollars annually on community investment initiatives and their sponsorship at the AGA is somewhere in the realm of twenty to thirty thousand dollars annually,[58] rendering it but a small instance of a much larger strategy.

Artwashing: What does it look like?

Takach has suggested that accepting funding for an art project—in Takach's work, a documentary film titled *Pay Dirt*—affects the content, perspective and ultimately advocacy of the art.[59] In a similar vein, this thesis asks whether Syncrude uses artistic sponsorship as a method to influence Albertan culture and to positively affect perspectives of the Albertan tar sands operation domestically and internationally.

As already alluded to, using art to improve one's corporate image has a name: Artwashing.[60] As Evans explains:

> Associations with high art are sought by oil companies in their mission to perform a role of Corporate Citizen. Therefore, to 'artwash' is to perform a role of Corporate Citizen. Therefore to 'artwash' is to perform, to pretend, to disguise…Like all these various washes [(making reference to greenwashing, whitewashing etc.)], to artwash is to do one thing in order to distract

[58] I base this number on the price of TREX (~15k per year) + what it would take to be listed as a sponsor of the type they are (5ish k) + very generous guesstimation of what random one-off exhibit sponsorship might cost (5-10k)
[59] Takach, 43-46.
[60] Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts.*

> from another…But it is more than this too. *The wash is made possible in the act, the performative moment in which companies take on a thoughtful, refined, cultured persona designed for an audience of special publics—opinion formers occupying influential positions in the media and politics*…Tina Mermiri, previously a researcher with the corporate sponsorship lobby group *Art & Business*, coined the term artwash as a caution to indiscreet sponsors[.][61]

I will be following Evans' usage of the theory of artwashing and applying it to a case in Alberta. Evans' research can be read similarly to that research and activism which questioned, and ultimately ended much of, artistic sponsorship from tobacco and armament corporations.[62] There therefore exists a rich academic literature from which to draw to understand newer, but not altogether unique, artwashing—that of 'Big Oil.' While the products and histories of the tobacco, armament and oil industries certainly vary, these industries operate in a similar social position "at the margins of social acceptability"[63] and therefore, derive similar value from artwashing. According to Evans' research, one of the principal ways oil corporations have sought to affect culture and their image is through targeting "influencers," "special publics,"[64] or to use corporate speak, "niche markets."[65] Drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Haacke, Evans finds some explicit evidence that targeting special publics was at least an explicit goal for U.S. tobacco company Philip Morris when its executive committee chairperson said in his advice to 21st century corporations: "Let's be clear about one thing. Our fundamental interest in the arts is self-interest. There are immediate and pragmatic benefits to be derived as business entities."[66] Evans goes on to assert that these benefits include acquiring a "social license to operate," as well as providing access—through art sponsorship—to 'influencers' who will assist the company in gaining local community acceptance as well as consumer approval.[67] Much earlier theoretical

[61] Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts,* 13, emphasis added.
[62] Evans, 14.
[63] Evans, 22.
[64] Evans, 12, 13, 79, 83,
[65] Evans, 89.
[66] Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange,* (London, UK: Polity Press, 1995), 8 quoted in Evans, 88.
[67] Evans, 88.

voices make similar points. Haacke, in a discussion around sponsorship, suggests "what we have here is really an exchange of capital: financial capital on the part of sponsors and symbolic on the part of the sponsored."[68] Or, as appears to be a more frequent theoretical justification, the companies are exchanging economic or financial capital (to the artist or museum) for, to use Bourdieu's language, *cultural capital.*[69] Evans offers numerous related and overlapping reasons for why corporations are interested not only in artistic sponsorship but in establishing a relationship with museums and cultural institutions. As Evans shows through a close reading of public relations literature aimed at assisting corporate entities, museums are sites that attract "influencers"[70] who are "opinion leaders…[who] have some degree of power" and "can influence perceptions by their behaviour."[71] Relatedly, "arts sponsorship is also about access: corporate events at galleries secure relationships within networks of power…[s]uch relationships are nurtured through the company's arts sponsorship deals."[72]

The Scope of this Project: Syncrude and the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA)

'Big Oil' is certainly too broad a group to undertake to study in a master's thesis. As such, I am making several restrictions to keep this research manageable. First, I will be limiting my geographical and geological areas of interest to the tar sands in Alberta. Second, as there are numerous corporate entities operating in the tar sands, I will not have time nor space to investigate their varied uses, or not, of artwashing. As such, I am limiting this work to the

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[68] Bourdieu and Haacke, 17.
[69] Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, (London, UK: Verso, 2002), 245; Gerald S. Kenyon, "Corporate Involvement in the Arts and the Reproduction of Power in Canada," in *Art and Business: An International Perspective on Sponsorship*, ed. Rosanne Martorella (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 34; Evans, 29.
[70] Evans, 79, 83.
[71] Leora Black, *The Social License to Operate: Your Management Framework for Complex* Times, (Oxford: Do Sustainability, 2013), 60 quoted in Evans, 83.
[72] Evans, 90.

corporate entity known as Syncrude. Syncrude is however not a single corporate entity, rather, it is a corporate conglomerate formed in 1968 by four American-controlled oil companies.[73] The initial Syncrude partners were Imperial Oil, Atlantic Ritchfield Company (ARCO), Cities Service Athabasca Ltd., and Royalite Oil Company;[74] since then, Syncrude's ownership has varied considerably.[75] The other largest extraction company working in the tar sands is Suncor Energy. While I will not be examining Suncor in any detail, it is important to note that Suncor now owns a 58% share in Syncrude through buying out, first, Petro-Canada Oil and Gas' 12% share, and more recently, in a hostile corporate takeover,[76] buying out Canadian Oil Sands Limited's 36.74% share.[77] Syncrude's current ownership is made up of Suncor Energy Inc. (58.74%), Imperial Oil Resources Limited (25%) (owned by ExxonMobil), Sinopec Oil Sands Partnership (9.03%) (owned by the government of China), and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) (7.23%).[78]

[73] Urquhart, 43.
[74] Urquhart, 43.
[75] For a timeline with all ownership changes, see "Daily Oil Bulletin: Reshaping a Giant: Syncrude Ownership 1965-2015," DOB Daily Infographic, https://www.dailyoilbulletin.com/supplement/daily-infographic/2015/10/5/reshaping-giant-syncrude-ownership-1965-2015/#sthash.2RNmvTnP.dpbs
[76]Tracy, Johnson, "Suncor and COS: The art of the Hostile Takeover," *CBC News*, December 22, 2015, https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/suncor-cos-hostile-rhetiric-1.3371801 .
[77] "Daily Oil Bulletin: Reshaping a Giant: Syncrude Ownership 1965-2015," DOB Daily Infographic, and https://www.syncrude.ca/our-company/ownership-and-investors/
[78] Syncrude, "Ownership & Investors, "last accessed July 1, 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/our-company/ownership-and-investors/ .

Chapter 2

Introduction

While Syncrude's use of artwashing as part of their broader community investment portfolio is a relatively recent phenomenon, this chapter demonstrates that Syncrude has long viewed public opinion as an important political resource. Further, this chapter details Syncrude's historical willingness and ability to gain public support for use in its negotiations with the Lougheed Alberta government in the early 1970s. While the agreement made between the Lougheed government and Syncrude was presented at the time as "on the government's terms," chapter two argues that Syncrude has actively driven much of the policy developments relating to the tar sands since the early 1970s, through in part, using the public as a lever to assert pressure on politicians through threatening their public support.

As Larry Pratt observed in 1976, studies of Canadian politics, certainly including Albertan resource politics, frequently "begin with the assumption that the state enjoys the last word in power[.]"[1] As Pratt exhaustively demonstrates in *The Tar Sands*, the oil industry's corporate power must be taken seriously, and moreover, understood as dynamic, collaborative, and in many ways, far removed from any kind of 'public interest.' Further, Pratt's study provides a compelling examination of pre- "bitumen triangle" relationships that existed amongst governments, their bureaucracies, and, the American oil industry. What Pratt shows, and what this chapter highlights, is that Syncrude specifically has not been an idle organization simply responding passively to the regulatory requirements of the state; instead, Syncrude has sought to maximize profits by minimizing risk through successfully convincing governments to not only

[1] Larry Pratt, *The Tar Sands: Syncrude and the Politics of Oil*, (Edmonton, AB: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 1976), 10.

fund many of the necessary components of an oil infrastructure, like roads to resources,[2] but also through managing to secure direct government involvement in that risk.[3] Syncrude was initially formed as an American owned oil conglomerate in 1964, but by 1974, the governments of Ontario, Alberta and Canada had respective stakes in Syncrude of five, ten and fifteen per cent. Corporate benefits stem from such state involvement because "[d]irect equity participation by government ensures that any antagonisms between the private sector and the owners of a new resource will be blunted by their mutual interest in seeing development succeed, in spite of high prices, environmental problems, labour strife, and so on."[4] The benefits derived from such an agreement for the government and its citizens are less straightforward and create what I think amounts to a conflict of interest between some kind of 'public interest,' which governments are often supposed to represent, and the government's perceived need to secure energy resources and generate revenue.

This chapter shows that Syncrude, and the oil industry generally, have significantly influenced, if not driven, the policy developments of the tar sands since the late 1960s. I am particularly interested in the political resource delivered to Syncrude through public support. Historically, from the late 1960s until about 2006, public resistance to the development of the tar sands has been relatively limited.[5] The primary exceptions to this trend, which Pratt does detail, were the Alberta civil service's numerous, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempts at encouraging the provincial government to be much more forceful with Syncrude. Popular resistance to tar sands development has risen noticeably since 2006, as at this time the tar sands' international

[2] Pratt, 127.
[3] Pratt, 128-132.
[4] Pratt, 164-165.
[5] Pratt, 143; Urquhart, 200.

profile began to grow,[6] resulting in an increased presence of environmental non-government organizations like Greenpeace in Alberta. The 'duck incident' detailed in chapter 1 furthered popular resistance and skepticism to tar sands expansion and needed to be defused. Through deft management of the issue and tactical newspaper advertisements, university donations and sincere-sounding promises, Syncrude effectively defended their interests which lay in the continued expansion of tar sands development. As such, this chapter establishes Syncrude's historical willingness and ability to assert themselves in the face of state power through in part, mobilizing public support for their activities, to achieve their own interests. Based on the history presented in chapter two, and the cultural analyses of Takach and Evans,[7] I contend that it is similarly plausible that Syncrude's need to affect Albertan culture as part of its profit maximizing function continues into the present. How Syncrude affects culture is admittedly multifaceted and difficult to measure empirically. Future chapters will therefore only look to one instance of Syncrude's broader cultural campaign—their use of artistic sponsorship to help curate public opinion.

This chapter is a historical one and as such, its organization is generally chronological. The first section examines the negotiations between the Lougheed government of Alberta and Syncrude resulting in a final deal in 1974. Next, I briefly detail the Syncrude-laced National Taskforce on Oil Sands Strategy and its effects on policy during the 1980s and 1990s in Alberta. Finally, I close with a look to the early 2000s and the beginnings of organized environmental non-government resistance oil development.

Historical Tar Sands Development in Alberta

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[6] Urquhart, 201; Takach, 46-47.
[7] See especially Takach, 43-46, Mel Evans 103-139.

The commercial extraction of the tar sands in northern Alberta began in 1967 when the Great Canadian Oil Sands' (GCOS)—later becoming Suncor Energy Inc.— 45,000-barrel-per-day oil plant construction project was completed as of September 30th.[8] The next year, "the first oil flow[ed] down the Interprovincial Pipe Line from Fort McMurray, Alberta to Sarnia, Ontario."[9] While the GCOS operation only came on line in 1967-1968, negotiations with governments prior to construction had begun so as to meet and understand regulatory requirements. At the same time, in 1964, Syncrude—long before its 1978 completion date— was initially established as a "consortium of Cities Service, Imperial Oil, Royalite, and Atlantic Richfield with the aim of seeking approval from Alberta's Oil and Gas Conservation Board to build a second oil sands plant not far from the GCOS operation north of Fort McMurray."[10] These developments occurred under Premier Manning's Social Credit administration; in 1971, Peter Lougheed and his Progressive Conservative party defeated the reigning 35 year dynasty of Social Credit, ultimately establishing their own dynasty which would last 44 years until 2015.[11] Lougheed is interesting in his own right as a character in Alberta's history and is too, an impactful and significant actor in the chronicle of oil sands development. For the purposes of this chapter, Peter Lougheed's experiences growing up in a family who lost much of their fortune during the Great Depression due to the dependence of the Albertan economy on the agriculture industry taught him the danger of agricultural dependency and led him to aggressively pursue an

[8] Gillian Steward, "Betting on Bitumen: Alberta's Energy Policies from Lougheed to Klein," (Parkland Institute and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, June 2017), 4; Suncor, "The Oil Sands Story, (1960s, 1970s & 1980s)," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.suncor.com/about-us/history/the-oil-sands-story .
[9] Suncor "The Oil Sands Story, (1960s, 1970s & 1980s)," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.suncor.com/about-us/history/the-oil-sands-story .
[10] Steward, 4, 11.
[11] Steward, 4,

economic diversification strategy focused principally on, ironically enough, a different staple: oil. [12]

On September 18 1973, following negotiations with Syncrude that had begun prior to his administration, Premier Lougheed appeared on prime time television to inform citizens that the Syncrude deal was a 'go' and would proceed on the 'government's terms.'[13] However, as Pratt persuasively demonstrates, we should be skeptical of Lougheed's claims about the deal on his self-described 'historic night'.[14] In general, Pratt argues and provides a case in point, that the public, certainly including political scientists, need to appreciate the incredible power and coordination of the oil industry and avoid over-emphasizing the state's power.[15] As Pratt and others have shown, the power differential between major oil companies and states with oil within them is significant—such a power differential led, for instance, to the creation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as a means to reduce that differential.[16]

Importantly, by 1972 a report had been produced by Alberta's civil service initially for the provincial cabinet to use regarding Alberta's energy negotiation strategy.[17] The report was leaked to Mel Hurtig— then national chairman of the Committee for an Independent Canada— who described the report as providing a pro-Canada approach to developing the tar sands that would avoid a relationship of dependence on foreign-owned corporations and reverse "the historical trend of ever increasing foreign control of nonrenewable resource development in

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[12] John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West*, (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1979), 15-22.
[13] Pratt, 19.
[14] Pratt, 19.
[15] Pratt, 9-10.
[16] Pratt 26; Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (London, UK: Verso, 2011), 167-169.
[17] Pratt, 22.

Canada.’”[18]As Pratt aptly observes, “an alternative to dependence and foreign corporate control had been spotted—and ignored.”[19]

As Lougheed was preparing to begin negotiations with Syncrude, his civil servants informed him that Syncrude’s strategy would likely revolve around minimizing their costs by maximizing those costs absorbed by the public (i.e., government). Moreover, the report pointed out how Syncrude’s corporate parents had a previously established relationship with non-Canadian firms that they would likely employ for development and construction (namely, Bechtel). The government must not allow this, the civil service argued, and instead, opt for development that made use of as much Canadian expertise, capital and labour as possible.[20] Essentially, the civil service wanted the provincial government to take a firm stand with the multinationals and set the terms of development. This however required a willingness to develop the resources without the multinationals; since such a position challenged many of the basic assumptions of Lougheed’s Conservative government it was therefore ignored.[21]

In November, 1972, as the civil service had warned, Syncrude hired Bechtel—an American owned company—to begin construction and did so as a *fait accompli*, to which the Lougheed government did not respond: “[t]he reluctance of the Lougheed cabinet to challenge the arrogance of the Syncrude-Bechtel *fait accompli* of November 1972, on the decisive issue of Canadian technology and engineering, a key theme of strategy of the civil servants for repatriating the tar sands, obviously made a mockery of the government’s vague Canadian ‘guidelines.’”[22] Clearly, the government’s primary focus was simply to keep Syncrude involved.

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[18] Conservation and Utilization Committee, “Athabasca Tar Sands Development Strategy,” quoted in Pratt, 22-23.
[19] Pratt, 23.
[20] Pratt, 122-123.
[21] Pratt, 124.
[22] Pratt, 126.

Because Syncrude's deal with Alberta would create key precedents for the oil industry, the oil industry presented a common front and no other applications for development other than Syncrude's was made. Further, and as already mentioned, the government was not willing to consider developing the tar sands on their own and accordingly, felt their only option was to essentially do what they must to keep Syncrude involved: "To Lougheed and his colleagues, the fate of the tar sands and the fate of Syncrude's application had become inseparable."[23]

While Syncrude argued for many different types of concessions, ranging from access to international prices to guaranteed strike-free labour, perhaps the most important factor to the consortium was their rate of return on investment which was largely affected by the royalty and taxation regime of the provincial and federal governments. As such, Syncrude rejected Alberta's April 1973 offer because it included royalties based on the fixed value of the resource which they argued had "crippled" the GCOS and would similarly affect Syncrude during years of no earnings. Instead, Syncrude proposed a royalty regime which would (a) not require payments during years of loss and (b) possess a built in guaranteed annual rate of return on investment. This led to Syncrude proposing a net profit approach where the government would get a percentage of Syncrude's net profits.[24] As Pratt points out, this is quite a problematic arrangement for a government to make with foreign owned transnational corporations because it is certainly possible, and likely in their interests as profit maximizing entities, for them to minimize their profits in Alberta by moving them " 'downstream' into other areas of [their] vertically integrated organization."[25] Further, the concessions continue as Syncrude is then guaranteed a rate of return through allowing them to deduct a base percentage of between eight

[23] Pratt, 126.
[24] Pratt, 128.
[25] Pratt, 128.

and ten percent on its investments as an allowed cost before arriving at a net profit figure.[26] To help the government make its decision regarding Syncrude's new offer, the Alberta government asked the Canadian Petroleum Association (CPA)— the "official lobby and mouthpiece of the large foreign oil companies operating in Canada"—for comment on the royalty issue. Predictably, the CPA agreed with Syncrude's proposed approach and argued that the government should in fact adopt the net profit approach.[27]

At this point, Lougheed created a political predicament for himself where his political future had become tied to Syncrude's success. While he certainly seemed willing to pay Syncrude's stiff price for a 'go' decision, he nonetheless needed to convince the public. Syncrude too had an interest in persuading the public of its viability. In this vein, Syncrude negotiators and the government of Alberta's public participation committee agreed that Alberta should have a minority passive stake in the project—effectively creating a path to generate public support through the establishment of the Alberta Energy Company (AEC) in 1973. [28] The AEC "was a combination of government and private financing: 49 per cent of the corporation was owned by the province, with the remaining equity coming from individual Albertans who were able to purchase shares at affordable prices. AEC included investments in oil and gas, pipelines, forestry, petrochemicals, coal, and steel. AEC's first share offering in 1975 attracted 60,000 buyers and was sold out in two weeks."[29] The directorships of the AEC were then filled mostly by non-government appointees.[30] The AEC ought therefore not to be thought of as a

[26] Pratt, 128.
[27] Pratt, 129.
[28] Pratt, 129-130.
[29]Richards and Pratt, and A. Tupper, "Peter Lougheed – 1971-1985," in *Alberta's Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, ed. B.J. Rennie (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004) both quoted in Steward, 10-11..
[30] Steward 4; Pratt, 130.

concession given from Syncrude to the government because it effectively tied the interests of the government of Alberta directly to those of Syncrude.[31]

In August of 1973 however, the Lougheed government began to see some of the issues presented by their agreement and had second thoughts. Principally, this came from the fact that Syncrude's estimated costs, originally fixed at $500 million rose to $650 million in January of 1973, hitting $750 million in March of 1973 and ultimately reaching just short of $1 billion in July.[32] The government understood these inflated cost estimates as a tactic Syncrude was using to secure greater and greater concessions from them. Moreover, the price of crude oil had been increasing steadily causing the government to doubt the industry's claim that the tar sands produced a 'marginal' product.[33] In August 1973, the government therefore proposed to remove the previously agreed upon guaranteed rate of return on investment and to insert a clause allowing the government the option of taking a 7.5% royalty on production after five years; and, in exceptional circumstances, the entire royalty scheme could be revised. Syncrude responded forcefully with a take it or leave it approach. The Alberta government then approached Shell to determine whether they could break the oil cartel's united front, but Shell simply stated that they shared Syncrude's concerns. Moreover, because Syncrude owned the relevant leases in the tar sands, unless the government was willing to strip them of these leases, Syncrude effectively possessed a veto which could block much tar sands development.[34] Syncrude's threat appeared more and more real; as they had warned, the government "would not find a group willing to

[31] Pratt, 130.
[32] Pratt, 134.
[33] Pratt, 134.
[34] Pratt, 138; Pratt argues that the government could have maneuvered around this issue by simply having the leases expire, see Pratt, 144.

spend a billion dollars very often. They would not find another customer should Syncrude decline."[35]

Syncrude then made a counter-offer which the Lougheed government accepted. These changes brought back in Syncrude's guaranteed rate of return on investment, as well as three additional concessions. First, labour stability was demanded (principally by Atlantic Richfield)[36] and promises were made (and later implemented) that if necessary to maintaining labour stability, the government would legislate no strike-labour laws for the tar sands.[37] Second, Syncrude wanted a federal tax ruling that royalties paid to Alberta could be deducted from federal taxes. Third, Syncrude would have access to international oil prices.[38] Access to international pricing was significant to Syncrude at the time because the federal government regulated the domestic price of oil in Canada even after world prices quadrupled between 1973-1974.[39] Both federal taxes and gaining access to international prices demanded the involvement of the federal government; in negotiating with the federal government, Syncrude secured the "staunch political backing of the Lougheed government"[40] and more, Alberta agreed that if Lougheed's efforts to sway the federal government were unsuccessful, Alberta would make up the difference.[41] Evidently, Albertan politicians had become convinced that Syncrude's success was important—perhaps vital— to their electability.

[35] Pratt, 137.
[36] Pratt, 139.
[37] In 1974, government enacts laws that make striking illegal in the tar sands, see Pratt, 147.
[38] Pratt, 139.
[39] Steward, 10.
[40] Pratt, 140.
[41] Pratt, 140.

Like their provincial counterparts, the P. Trudeau government was also convinced the only way to develop the tar sands was through Syncrude.[42] As such, the Trudeau government fashioned a financial loophole for Syncrude to use to basically deduct royalty payments from taxable revenue. More, Trudeau begins making speeches around this time to build public support for raising the international price of oil,[43] for Syncrude had begun to warn that if international prices did not begin to factor into Canadian domestic prices, they would withhold vital energy supplies.[44]

In March 1974, the federal government nearly doubled the domestic price of oil in Canada from $3.80 a barrel to $6.50 a barrel.[45] In light of these changes, Lougheed used the increased price of domestic oil as an opportunity to free himself of the fixed royalty arrangement and declared that royalties would float with the price of oil. While the CPA screeched loudly, the extra $740 million in revenue that industry derived from these new prices proved adequate in eventually quieting them.[46] On May 6, 1974, Ottawa closed the loophole they had previously fashioned and made royalty payments paid to Alberta no longer deductible from federal taxes—increasing the oil industry's tax bill by about $630 million annually.[47] Syncrude once again responded forcefully and won new concessions. The oil industry threatened Alberta and Canada's economy through cancelling future exploration plans, as well as encouraging their employees to demonstrate and protest in the literal face of Trudeau on a visit to Calgary—again, using a sub-set of the public to pressure politicians. In light of this, Peter Lougheed began to mend fences with the industry "when his government quietly reclassified 10 trillion cubic feet of

[42] Pratt, 144.
[43] Pratt, 144-146.
[44] Pratt, 151-153.
[45] Pratt, 151.
[46] Pratt, 154.
[47] Pratt, 154.

natural gas from 'old' to 'new' gas, thus reducing the supplementary royalty from sixty-five to thirty-five percent."[48] Notably, this move was once again *against* the advice of Alberta's own civil service and consistent with that of the CPA.[49] The Federal government also made an arrangement with the oil industry to retreat somewhat from their earlier tax bill in the amount of a $100 million reduction so that "the companies would turn their attention to the provinces."[50] As a result, the industry then turned once again to the provinces and pressured the Alberta government to reduce its royalty demands. Simultaneously, several large oil companies announced major reductions in planned oil and gas spending and exploration. Further, daily gossip in Calgary began to suggest that drilling rigs were being moved—sometimes at night—to the United States.[51] Intense public and private pressure began to mount against the Alberta government to reduce its royalties on the oil industry.[52] The crucial blow, as Pratt describes it, then came on December 4, 1974 when Atlantic Richfield—one of the initial partners of Syncrude—announced its immediate withdrawal from the giant project.[53] As Pratt suggests, Atlantic Richfield left for its own reasons, but certainly timed its withdrawal announcement for maximum impact that would improve Syncrude's bargaining position.[54]

Because Lougheed "had deliberately created public expectations of growth and spectacular progress and his personal image and credibility were now bound up with Syncrude's fate… the project would have to be rescued."[55] Lougheed once again eased the pressure somewhat with his Petroleum Exploration Plan implemented on December 12, which essentially

[48] Pratt, 155.
[49] Pratt, 155.
[50] Pratt, 156.
[51] Pratt, 156.
[52] Pratt, 161.
[53] Pratt, 162.
[54] Pratt, 163.
[55] Pratt, 163.

returned an annual $300 to $500 million to the oil industry.[56] This new concession proved inadequate and Syncrude demanded, on January 16, 1975 in a joint press conference, (a) access to international oil prices; (b) "fresh guarantees of exemption from the non-deductibility provisions of the [federal] Turner budget as well as from any future pro-rationing of oil production"; (c) and an additional $1 billion in equity/tax concessions. These demands needed to be met by January 31 (sixteen days later), or the entire project would be shut down. [57] While Syncrude behaved as though their main target from this arrangement was the additional billion dollars, "[t]here is a suspicion among federal officials that the money is secondary, that the real object is the security or protection that would come from government involvement in a risky, costly project… because [d]irect equity participation by government ensures that any antagonisms between the private sector and the owners of a new resource will be blunted by their mutual interest in seeing development succeed, in spite of high prices, environmental problems, labour strife, and so on."[58] Humorously, in what could certainly pass for the managerial prowess of Michael Scott from an episode of *The Office*, the Alberta and federal government end up relying on a report produced by consulting firms, firstly, with quite clear ties to the oil industry, and hilariously, that does not come in until February 1, *after* the deal will have already been signed or killed.[59]

While in December 1973, the federal government had been unwilling to give Syncrude access to international oil prices because it would bind the hands of future governments, they dispensed with such cautions in 1974 when Ottawa promised that they would be able to sell oil at

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[56] Pratt, 163.
[57] Pratt, 164.
[58] Pratt, 164-165.
[59] Pratt, 168.

an 'internationally related price.'[60] On January 30th, one day before Syncrude's deadline, the federal cabinet agreed to invest between $200 and $500 million in the project.[61]

> Under the terms of the 'gentlemen's agreement' negotiated in Winnipeg, Syncrude became the offspring of three Canadian governments and three U.S.-controlled companies. The new equity shares and capital commitments broke down as follows: Imperial Oil increased its percentage holdings by 1.25 percent to 31.25 percent but increased its dollar commitments to $625 million; Gulf increased its equity share by 6.75 percent to 16.75 percent and its dollar commitments to $235 million. Cities Service decreased its percentage by eight percent to twenty-two percent and increased its dollar commitment to $140 million. Ottawa agreed to come in for fifteen percent, or $300 million on a project estimate of $2 billion; Alberta took ten percent of the risk capital, or $200 million; and Ontario took five percent or $100 million. The three companies have seventy percent ownership, and interestingly, *Imperial Oil has just enough equity to outvote the three governments combined.*[62]

Importantly, as Pratt once again demonstrates, while 70% of Syncrude's equity was privately owned, these companies did not pay for 70% of the operation because "Syncrude is a joint venture and not a separate company, under federal tax rules the companies can write off their full investment ($1.4 billion) in the project from their taxable income of presently producing oil wells. These write-offs should be worth just over $500 million to the corporations."[63] Additional allowable claims were worth another $170 million, and royalty payments were also still deductible. Further still, the companies solidified the net profit arrangement with the governments allowing them to effectively minimize profit in Canada to maximize it globally.[64]

Supporting the Sands Technologically

Examining other avenues of government support for Syncrude, Steward examines the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority (AOSTRA), established in 1974 by the

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[60] Pratt, 171.
[61] Pratt, 172.
[62] Pratt, 175-176, emphasis added.
[63] Pratt, 176.
[64] Pratt, 176.

Lougheed government as "a government-funded agency which aimed to accelerate the development of oil sands technology."[65] She points out, citing Hester and Lawrence, that AOSTRA has spent C$448 million dollars on "public-private projects and institutional research, making AOSTRA one of the largest research and development programs ever launched in Canada."[66] Crucially, steam-assisted gravity drainage (SAGD), the technology which allows for the majority of *in situ* operations in Alberta, was developed by AOSTRA. [67] As Kevin Timoney describes,

> Well-based *in situ* methods are required where a deep overburden exists (>75 m thick) or where bitumen is trapped in carbonate rocks. By volume, about 90% of Alberta's bitumen reserves require well-based extraction (ARC 2009). The primary method of well-based extraction is [SAGD] in which pressure and heat cause the bitumen and water to separate and migrate to production wells from which the bitumen is pumped to the surface, diluted, and carried in pipelines to processing facilities.[68]

Thus, while other authors, such as Taft, characterize Peter Lougheed as "stand[ing] up to the oil industry,"[69] such is a temporary stand as *Prairie Capitalism* and *The Tar Sands* clearly demonstrated some time ago. In 1978, "[a]fter 14 years of development, Syncrude Canada joins Suncor as the province's second oil sands producer."[70] From here, the scale of operation escalates quite incredibly. From 1971-1996, "oil sands production increases from 30,000 to 540,000 barrels *per day*."[71] Over this same period, an increase of 5 to 30 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent occurs in emissions from the tar sands.[72]

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[65] Steward, 11.
[66] A. Hester and L. Lawrence, "A sub national public-private strategic alliance for innovation and export development: the case of the Canadian province of Alberta's oil sands, (United Nations, Santiago, Chile: Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean, quoted in Steward, 11.
[67] Steward, 11.
[68] Kevin P. Timoney, *Impaired Wetlands in a Damaged Landscape,* 4.
[69] Taft, 139.
[70] Steward, 5; Syncrude, "About Us," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/our-company/overview/
[71] Steward, 7.
[72] Jacob G Englander, Sharad Bharadwaj and Adam R Brandt, "Historical Trends in Greenhouse Gas Emissions of the Alberta Oil Sands (1970-2010)," *Environmental Research Letters* 8, no. 4 (2013): 5.

The 1980s and the National Task Force on Oil Sands Strategies

Through the 1980s, the Albertan government, along with tar sands interests, championed the neoliberal reforms of the 1989 free trade agreement, while the Alberta Chamber of Resources (ACR) simultaneously championed state subsidization for tar sands industries.[73] In that vein, the ACR in 1984 established an industry task force, the National Task Force on Oil Sands Strategies, in which "Syncrude executives played key roles in ACR and the industry-dominated task force (45 of 57 task force members were self-appointed from industry; eventually, the governments of Alberta and Canada each made six appointments)."[74] The National Energy Board (NEB), an "independent federal regulator established in 1959,"[75] produced a pessimistic forecast of oil sands development in their 20-year forecast report from 1985-2005 in 1986. They projected no increases in the production capacity of the oil sands from 1985-2005. The national task force responded in kind with a far more optimistic report (from the purview of oil sands producers) produced in 1987 rebutting the claims of the NEB.[76]

As Steward contends, the National Task Force's power and influence only grew from its inception. Ralph Klein became premier in 1992 and his strategy "was developed almost entirely under the aegis of the [ACR]." In 1995, the task force released its 62-page report at the Montreal Stock Exchange, containing within it many recommendations for governments, such as a harmonized federal/provincial royalty and tax program; a recommendation that governments should continue to support "pre-competitive research and development via expanded industry-led

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[73] Urquhart, 52.
[74] Steward, 5.
[75] National Energy Board, "National Energy Board- Fact Sheet," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.neb-one.gc.ca/bts/whwr/nbfctsht-eng.html .
[76] Urquhart, 53.

collaborative research activities[.]"[77] As Steward summarizes, the 1995 task force report proposed a new kind of state-industry collaboration different from those that existed under Lougheed and Getty with "fewer megaprojects, more smaller in-situ projects, and no direct government financing."[78] As the task force's report became public, Eric Newell, then president of Syncrude Canada and head of the task force, "embarked on a cross-country speaking tour to promote its findings and push for oil sands development."[79] While Newell had to convince many provincial governments and the federal government, "Ralph Klein's Alberta government didn't need a sales job. It immediately began discussions on the task force's recommendations."[80] Ultimately, the federal government announced its budgetary changes to the tar sands industry, which Alberta energy minister Pat Black (now, Nelson), told the Alberta legislature was a direct result of the task force's recommendations.[81]

In November 1995, to facilitate the Klein government's focus on debt reduction, the government adhered to the task force's recommendations to "streamline the project approval process…The new system introduced self-regulation, which meant *oil sands corporations became responsible for regulating themselves*."[82] Furthermore, still in line with the task force's report, the Klein government, in this same month of November 1995, announced a new universal royalty regime which would be applied to all new projects—instead of the older system of case-by-case.[83] In the federal government's 1996 budget, "the government of Canada makes the tax changes the industry-dominated task force had recommended 10 months earlier. But 1996 also

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[77] Steward, 23.
[78] Steward, 24.
[79] Steward, 27.
[80] Steward, 27.
[81] Steward, 29.
[82] Steward, 6, emphasis added.
[83] Steward, 6.

introduced new tax incentives to spur investment in the oil industry."[84] If the goal was to increase oil sands production with these policies, then they were certainly successful: From 1996-2007, oil sands production increased further from 540,000 to 1.4 million barrels per day."[85] Over this same period, Albertan emissions increased from 30 to 40 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.[86]

The growth of the tar sands was greater than even the National Task Force had imagined: They hoped for $26 billion invested by 2020 and instead, between 1996-2006, $34 billion was in fact invested.[87] Surprisingly, even though this expansion increased emissions significantly, Environmental Non-Government Organizations (ENGOs) outside of Alberta were slow to respond to Alberta's fervent development in the tar sands. In fact, Pratt offers that one of the alluring components of the tar sands to oil producers compared with, say, the Colorado Shales, stems from Alberta's relatively quiet environmentalist scene.[88] As Urquhart shows, for example, Greenpeace did little beyond engage rhetorically with the destructive impact of the sands. Similarly, while the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) objected to the increased emissions required for tar sands oil productions compared to conventional oil production, their 2002 report "is stunning" as there is not "one critical word raised about the similar threats that exploiting the tar sands posed to the boreal forest."[89]

As Alberta was trying to elevate the profile of the tar sands internationally, as described briefly in chapter 1, an opportunity opened to the provincial government to "cement or further

[84] Steward, 7.
[85] Steward, 7.
[86] Jacob G Englander, Sharad Bharadwaj and Adam R Brandt, 5.
[87] Urquhart, 199.
[88] Pratt, 143.
[89] Urquhart, 200, emphasis added.

the recognition of the tar sands' importance to America's appetite for secure oil."[90] To that end, the Alberta government accepted an invitation to participate in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2006.[91] One of the province's main contributions to the festival, in an attempt to show-off the scale of the tar sands by using a prestigious event with a serious artistic component, was to bring a 400-tonne-per-load yellow truck to the festival. Environmentalists seized on this opportunity to 'hammer' both the Smithsonian for allowing the display and the Albertan government for providing a display aimed at promoting tar sands exploitation distracting from the 120+ Albertan artists at the festival *not* associated with petroleum who were invited to the festival.[92]

The year 2006 therefore marks the beginning of more substantive resistance to oil sands development by ENGOs. Greenpeace had arrived in Alberta in 2007 and actively protested development "rappel[ing] themselves from the ceiling of Edmonton's Convention Centre to hang the banner "$telmach: the best Premier oil money can buy," during the annual premier's dinner in 2008; they chained themselves to tar sands mining equipment and scaled upgraders to unfurl banners…Greenpeace's chutzpah certainly succeeded in putting the media spotlight on the tar sands operations of companies such as Syncrude, Suncor and Shell."[93] Such developments prompted the Stelmach government to launch an advertising campaign of their own for it was the international media, they claimed, who was getting it wrong—telling an unbalanced story.[94] The government then launched a 3-year $25 million dollar advertising and marketing campaign to develop, in the words of a government memo unearthed by Urquhart, "[a] brand that will work to

[90] Urquhart, 201.
[91] Urquhart, 201.
[92] Urquhart, 202.
[93] Urquhart, 203.
[94] Urquhart, 204.

reinforce a positive accurate picture of Alberta, and to increase awareness of our province as a great place to live, work, invest, and visit."[95]

The brand becomes troubled when in 2008 the dead ducks incident described in detail in chapter 1 unfolds. A similar phenomenon unfolds as we have already seen where the media latches on to the dead duck incident to launch a critique of the tar sands which the Alberta government then attempts to manage in coordination with the oil industry, and eventually, the universities of Alberta. In this context of domestic and international pressure, the Stelmach government began to make changes to their climate change policies trying to alleviate some of this pressure. The 2008 plan promised reductions in emissions *intensity*, but importantly, not absolute emissions—problematic because as Urquhart points out, citing the work of Matthew Bramley, "since the intensity benchmark is based on the size of the economy, emissions intensity reductions can occur while the total tonnage of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere actually increases."[96] It also promised a whopping 200-million-tonne reduction in GHG by 2050 (the most ambitious target in Canada), through largely carbon capture and storage technologies (which as Urquhart points out, "hadn't been used commercially anywhere in Alberta").[97] One of the options that was available (there were four,)[98] to meet the *Specified Gas Emitters Regulation* (which sought to realize these climate goals) was to pay into a fund which would finance initiatives with the *potential* to reduce GHG emissions. "Each $15 payment bought large emitters a credit for one tonne of GHG emissions. For example, in 2011 government credited Syncrude with the equivalent of reducing emissions by more than 1.4 million tonnes in return for the more

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[95] Urquhart, 204.
[96] Matthew Bramley, *An Assesment of Alberta's Climate Change Action Plan*, (Drayton Valley, AB: Pembina Institute for Appropriate Development, 2002), quoted in Urquhart, 205.
[97] Urquhart, 245.
[98] See Urquhart, 247.

than $21.1 million Syncrude contributed to the fund."[99] While these attempts were indeed successful in reducing emissions intensity, as Urquhart shows, from 2005 to 2010, emissions nearly doubled from the tar sands. From 2010 until 2014, there was an *annual* increase of approximately 3 megatonnnes of emissions each year even while emissions intensities continue to lower.[100]

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that there is a historical case to be made, beginning with Pratt's analysis, that much of the energy-policy infrastructure in Alberta, and in Canada even, has been driven not by the interests of the Canadian public, nor those of Albertans, but rather, by those of Syncrude. Further, this chapter highlights that Syncrude has been active in guiding public opinion since the 1970s—with tactics ranging from, for example, facilitating and encouraging employee protest at political events to tying subsets of the public to Syncrude's financial success through the AEC. Pratt pointed out in 1976, Syncrude "is not an independent, profit making corporation. It is merely a carboard store-front company, the creature of its owners' interest, enjoying the appearance but not the substance of power. What lies behind it, however, is something else again."[101] Importantly, readers will notice that three of Syncrude's owners are in fact the governments of Alberta, Ontario and Canada; however, it is worth re-stating, "Imperial Oil has just enough equity to outvote the three governments combined."[102] Such a sentiment has even been confirmed by one participant of the ordeal, Donald Macdonald,

[99] Urquhart, 247.
[100] Uruhart,248.
[101] Pratt, 118-119.
[102] Pratt, 175-176, emphasis added.

who when asked if these negotiation were akin to "being over a barrel," replied with "[w]ell, ha, ha, ha, being over, I suppose, 125,000 barrels."[103]

As I have shown through citing the work of Urquhart and Takach, in recent years the bitumen-triangle (the government of Alberta, tar sands industry and the universities in Alberta) has sought to affect the culture of Alberta insofar as making it a welcoming place for oil industry to extract. The connection this chapter makes demonstrates that there is reason to dive deeply into the specific ways in which Syncrude tries to affect culture in Alberta presently.

[103] 125,000 barrels refers to Syncrude's approximate production capabilities by the end of the negotiations. Pratt, *The Tar Sands*, 174 citing Macdonald getting interviewed by Barbara Frum on CBC's "As it Happens."

Chapter 3

"A walk through Alberta's northern woodlands reveals a beautiful world. Listen closely and you will hear layers of distinctive sounds and wandering through the landscape the dance of sun and shadows clears and illuminates your vision.//Seekers with a sense of purpose, the Indigenous artists featured in the Woodlands exhibition express a deep appreciation of the natural world through their art…This exhibition was generously funded by Syncrude Canada Ltd."[1]

"What we are seeing in the communities around these projects are elevated rates of cancers and respiratory illnesses like emphysema and asthma because of air quality issues and water contamination, as well as the destruction and complete fragmentation of the boreal forest. …. Tar sands expansion will eventually drive out much of the remaining wildlife in the area that has not already been affected by underground mining (i.e., in situ projects) or the massive open pit mines… The woodlands caribou, a food source that First Nations have used for millennia, are projected to be extirpated by 2040. And not only is wildlife declining in population and being driven away, but what remains is becoming a contaminated food source for local communities."[2]

Anecdotal evidence can be found, for example, in the first quote in the epigraph above, that justifies being suspicious of corporations sponsoring art. Inquiring minds should read an exhibition description of this kind—present at the AGA for nearly a year from Dec 13 2017 to Dec 8 2018— and wonder if it might somehow be compromised or aimed at affecting how we understand and make sense of Syncrude and its relationship to the northern woodlands. In the academic literature studying corporate art sponsorship and collecting, it is widely accepted that the corporate sponsorship of museum art is an exercise of corporate power aimed at exchanging economic capital for cultural capital.[3] Mel Evans' case study of London's Tate Museum in the United Kingdom (UK) suggests that the corporate sponsorship of art "play[s] a vital role in securing access to power and acceptability in the eyes of consuming publics."[4] The purpose of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate that there are theoretical and comparative justifications to

[1] Art Gallery of Alberta Woodlands exhibition, Dec 13 2017-Dec 5, 2018, https://www.youraga.ca/exhibitions/woodlands .
[2] Melina Laboucan-Massimo, "Awaiting Justice: The Ceaseless Struggle of the Lubicon Cree," in *A Line in the Tar Sands: Struggles for Environmental Justice*, (Ontario: PM Press, 2014), 116.
[3] Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, (London, UK: Verso, 2002), 245; Gerald S. Kenyon, "Corporate Involvement in the Arts and the Reproduction of Power in Canada," in *Art and Business: An International Perspective on Sponsorship*, ed. Rosanne Martorella (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 34; Evans, 29.
[4] Evans, 12.

hypothesize that, in the context of Syncrude's tar sands operations in Alberta, there exists a relationship between Syncrude's desire to affect public opinion and their sponsorship of AGA art exhibitions. I believe this will be especially apparent during incidents particularly harmful to Syncrude's image such as the 2008 duck incident discussed in chapter one. This chapter therefore provides the foundations for my hypothesis which I will test more directly in chapter 4, which is that Syncrude's sponsorship of art at the AGA is driven by a need to manage and curate public opinion to maximize long term profits.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, through a brief literature review, I show that there is robust theoretical argument that corporations derive some kind of value—frequently described as "cultural capital"—from artistic sponsorship. Second, I briefly show some of the explicit justifications given by oil company spokespeople for their company's sponsorship of art. Third, I examine the risks and impacts of oil companies' sponsorship of art. Finally, I close by looking at the AGA specifically and how its funding model, since 1985, has made it increasingly reliant on corporate sponsorship paving the way for "artwashing" at the AGA.

Theoretical Justifications

Bourdieu's theorization of the benefits of sponsorship for corporations is seminal. Wu, for example, summarizes by saying that "Bourdieu held not only that cultural capital is freely interchangeable with economic wealth, but also that the accumulations of cultural capital serve specifically to reproduce and consolidate the position of the dominant class."[5] Further, Wu is careful to point out the multifarious benefits derived from corporate art collecting and sponsorship, such as the potential financial investment of the art,[6] or the recruitment function that

[5] Wu, 243.
[6] Wu, 248.

art can play in competitive industries;[7] yet for Wu it is "its attraction as a status-conferring object [that] is perennial."[8] Eggert echoes Bourdieu's hypothesis, testing at first, and ultimately finding that in the cases of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the AGA, the "administration[s] gain[] economic capital, while the donor—whether the government or corporation—receives an increase in cultural capital, elevating the status of the organization."[9] Eggert ends up supporting Schiller's specific argumentation that the sponsorship of the arts is a "relatively inexpensive way of demonstrating corporate good behaviour and general concern for the public interest."[10] Evans echoes such a sentiment writing that "[w]hatever the amount the company donates in arts funding, they are able to take out ten times as much in social legitimacy."[11] Such an exchange can be accomplished, says Eggert, "by funding museum expansions, sponsoring exhibits, and providing services such as free admissions. [Moreover,] [p]roviding for the arts also provides the corporation with access to a new audience through advertising its support of the arts through gallery publications and events."[12]

Adding additional nuance and extending her argument, Eggert cites Wulfson's argument that "corporate giving serves dual purposes as it provides needed funding for charitable causes while also benefitting the corporate bottom line and increasing the company's legitimacy in the community."[13] Others however, as Eggert shows, are less charitable in their outlook: as David DesRoches argues, the core function of museum sponsorship for corporations is to "create

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[7] Wu, 250.
[8] Wu, 250.
[9] Sarah Helena Eggert," The Politics of Funding: The Impact of Federal and Corporate Funding on the Art Gallery of Alberta and the Art Gallery of Ontario," (thesis, University of Alberta, 2017), 2.
[10]Herbert Schiller, "Corporate Sponsorship: Institutionalized Censorship of the Cultural Realm," *Art* Journal 50, no.3 (1991): 58 quoted in Eggert, 60.
[11] Evans, 89.
[12] Eggert, 60.
[13] Myrna Wulfson, "The Ethics of Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropic Ventures," *Journal of Business Ethics,* 29 no. 1/2 (2001):141 quoted in Eggert, 63.

partnerships with institutions that advocate for the public good."[14] The bottom line for corporate sponsorship is however ultimately concerned with just that: "While corporations attempt to frame their charitable donations to the arts as acts of goodwill, it must be argued that the root cause of financial support is self-serving."[15]

Beyond looking at corporate sponsorship exclusively, Eggert finds the motivations of cultural sponsorship for corporations and governments to be the same: "[b]y providing funds for the projects, the government of Canada exchanged economic capital for an increase in social capital."[16]While the focus of this thesis is to investigate the corporate motivations for, and possible benefits of, accruing social capital, it is nonetheless important to note that governments also have tangible benefits (like re-election) to be derived from shaping public opinion. While a literature therefore clearly exists examining the relationship between art and business, Mel Evans provides a unique account in her theorization of the specific relationship between oil corporations (primarily, British Petroleum (BP)) and art. According to Evans, the sponsorship of art in public art institutions by oil corporations ought to be thought of as "artwashing." Artwashing is a tactic of oil corporations' broader performance of being a good corporate citizen.[17] The goal of artwashing is to create a sense of authenticity out of sponsorship—to "render" the sponsor authentic.[18]

Evans work is uniquely valuable because it is rooted in the documents read by the corporations doing the sponsorship. She writes:

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[14] Davina M. Desroches, "The Marketized Museum: New Museology in a Corporatized World," *The Political Economy of* Communication 3, no. 1 (2015): 10, quoted in Eggert, 66.
[15] Eggert, 67.
[16] Eggert, 21.
[17] Evans, 14.
[18] James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, "Using art to render authenticity in business," in *Beyond Experience: Culture, Consumer & Brand* ed. Tina Mermiri, (London, UK: Arts & Business, 2012), 6 quoted in Evans, 96.

A&B [(Arts and Business, a non-governmental organization located in the UK that brokers and facilitates art-corporate relationships)] house a well-stocked, private arts and cultural policy library, which I gained access to during this research. It also produces reports persuading the value of corporate sponsorships. A key set of publications in their series is *Beyond Experience.* It is written by Tina Mermiri, Research Manager at A&B, alongside Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, the duo of management advisors renowned in their field for their book *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*.[19]

The report, *Beyond Experience*, sought to demonstrate "how businesses can offer their consumers authenticity and meaning through their use of and engagement with the arts."[20] *Beyond Experience* follows from Thomson and Black's work which follows from the work of Boutilier—who borrowed from "Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as an available tactic to manage socio-political risk and preserve social license."[21] Thomson and Black argue that companies should aim to build trust and create 'psychological identification' between the company and the public.[22] From such a point, *Beyond Experience* seeks to demonstrate "how art sponsorships can be applied to offer 'authenticity and meaning' to the sponsor."[23] In fact, Pine, Gilmore and Mermiri write "'[w]e argue in this and any economic climate, that the arts, which are becoming increasingly present in people's lives and are inherently considered meaningful, can help *restore trust* and maintain brand loyalty for a business engaging their customers in more direct and innovative ways.'"[24] Thus, through 'authentic' sponsorship, the company is made 'authentic;' as though authenticity and meaningfulness, qualities Pine, Gilmore and Mermiri see in art, are commodities available for purchase through sponsorship. [25] Indeed, as Evans explicitly points out, and as Urquhart asserted was the case in Alberta too, the "fundamental cynicism" of

[19] Evans, 95.
[20] James H. Gilmore, B. Joseph Pine II and Tina Mermiri, "Executive Summary" in *Beyond Experience: Culture, Consumer & Brand* ed. Tina Mermiri, (London, UK: Arts & Business, 2012), 5 quoted in Evans 95.
[21] Evans, 89.
[22] Evans, 95.
[23] Evans, 95.
[24] James H. Gilmore, B. Joseph Pine II and Tina Mermiri, "Executive Summary" in *Beyond Experience: Culture, Consumer & Brand* ed. Tina Mermiri, (London, UK: Arts & Business, 2012), 7 quoted in Evans, 97, emphasis added.
[25] Pine and Gilmore in Evans, 97.

public relations models of this kind is that they are aimed at establishing and maintaining the public acceptance of their operations without actually addressing the concerns of stakeholders.[26]

Pine, Gilmore and Mermiri therefore present explicitly what they think the corporate sponsorship of art should accomplish. Evans does however broaden their analysis significantly, and with greater critical attention. Broadly, Evans suggests that "cultural institutions [(such as museums)] often manifest public opinion."[27] Further, museums are seen by corporations as sites that attract "opinion formers," that is, people whose opinions guide broader public opinion formations and trends.[28] In particular, the "restor[ing] trust" component of Pine & Gilmore's definition is especially pronounced and relevant to oil companies because of the frequency with which communities in which oil companies operate are negatively affected by the oil industry in significant ways. Therefore, Evans suggests, "cultural sponsorships seek to repair relationships with communities harmed by oil[.]"[29] There appear to be two phases to cultural sponsorship as alluded to by Pine, Gilmore and Mermiri's understanding of the function of corporate sponsorship: "The technique of sponsoring cultural events in the vicinity of extractions projects at *first* aims to secure brokerage of deals, but all too often it becomes an attempt to *rebuild trust* following an accident or opposition."[30] Such theorization is therefore the grounds to hypothesize that Syncrude used their previously existing relationship with the AGA as part of the broader strategy of the bitumen-triangle to manage a positive public image, but too it is significant that much of Syncrude's sponsorship is geographically located in the "vicinity of extraction

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[26] Evans, 84, 99
[27] Evans, 19.
[28] Tom Henderson and John Williams, "Shell: Managing a Corporate Reputation," in *Public Relations Cases* eds. Barbare DeSanto and Daniel Moss (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 12 quoted in Evans, 79.
[29] Evans, 32.
[30] Evans, 28, emphasis added.

projects"[31] consistent with "[n]umerous oil companies [that] follow this trend to collect art or sponsor exhibitions in the places the company extracts oil."[32]

Empirical

Conveniently, oil companies have been explicit in why and how they use artistic sponsorship. Evans' research into BP led her to discover that Wendy Stephenson, a sponsorship consultant responsible for the delivery of BP and Shell's arts sponsorship contracts in London, said that "they milk the sponsorship for what its worth."[33] Mobil Oil has been even more explicit, describing themselves as "modern day Medicis."[34] An Exxon spokesperson described vividly their sponsorship reasoning: "Exxon's support of the arts serves the arts as a social lubricant. And if business is to continue in big cities, it needs a more lubricated environment."[35] Note that Exxon and Mobil have since merged into ExxonMobil, and today own a 25% stake in Syncrude through their ownership of Imperial Oil.[36]

In her study on the politics of funding at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the AGA, Eggert argues that "by establishing a partnership with the Art Gallery of Alberta that promotes Servus Credit Union's support of and involvement in the arts, the financial institution's administration attempts to demonstrate that it is invested in the community."[37] Similarly, I hypothesize that Syncrude has far more to gain than a financial institution—because Syncrude's profits are

[31] Evans, 26.
[32] Evans, 26.
[33] Wendy Stephenson, quoted in Farah Nayeri, "Europe's Corporate Art Sponsors Seek More Bang for their Bucks," *Bloomberg,* March 3 2005, quoted in Evans, 6.
[34] Wu, 254.
[35] Rosalyn Deutsche, Hans Haacke, Fredric Jameson, Leo Steinberg and Brian Wallis, *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* ed. Brian Wallis, (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), quoted in Wu, 267.
[36] J. William Carpenter, "Top 5 Companies Owned by Exxon Mobil (XOM)," *Investopedia*, last modified October 13, 2015, last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.investopedia.com/articles/markets/101315/top-5-companies-owned-exxon-mobil.asp .
[37] Eggert, 44.

dependent on geographically restricted resources whereas while Servus similarly only operates in Alberta, it does not rely on a geographically specific resource like tar sands companies do—through demonstrating its investment in the community.

Risks of Sponsorship

As has been suggested thus far, art sponsorship is non-neutral and has tangible impacts, though difficult to measure they may be. In Eggert's study, these effects resulted in changes made to the language and rhetoric deployed by the gallery to better align themselves with the "practices and purse strings of corporate donors."[38] For Evans, a kind of psychological identification between the art consumer and the corporation appears to be an effect: "By seeding itself into our homes, sports events, work places, streets, galleries, and museums, Big Oil convinces us of its own worthiness and centrality to our ways of life."[39] Moreover, Evans suggests there is empirical evidence that sponsorship affects consumers' psychological identification with a company: BP's sponsorship of the Olympics resulted in an increase of 8.5 percent in trust and positive feeling with BP.[40]

While there is certainly room for imagining the multifaceted implications of museums accepting corporate sponsorship in Evans' work, she is also quite explicit in listing what she sees as the "risks" of accepting sponsorship. Evans contends that the acceptance of sponsorship from big oil is risky for large cultural institutions because of "the political influence allowed to the oil lobby, stymying efforts to tackle climate change; the uncomfortable disjuncture between the oil sponsor branded on the entrance of the gallery and the artworks, learning programmes and

[38] Eggert, 9.
[39] Evans, 70.
[40] Evans, 83

curatorial intentions of specific exhibition; and the restraints put on our imaginations through Big Oil's co-optation of these spaces meant for creativity and reflection."[41] Moreover, many internal contradictions flourish from this sponsorship. Take for instance how changed a "celebration of the careful craft of finding visual languages for sacred and splendid landscapes," becomes when it bears, for example, the name of a mining company as its sponsor.[42] Indeed, for Evans, "[i]f art relates to the oil industry or the environment in any way, a conflicting dynamic arises between the artwork, gallery, and sponsor."[43] Furthermore, cultural institutions might even claim[44] that they are somehow acting in the public interest yet accept substantial sponsorship from oil; thus collapsing oil corporations and cultural institutions into a shared category of 'public good.' Further still, "beyond advertising benefits for the company, oil sponsorship impacts on curating, artists and their artworks and audience experience."[45] Ultimately however, the risk that materialized in the case in question for Evans—at Tate museum in the UK—was that "[r]ather than a partly publicly-funded cultural institution with staff that seek to encourage critical thinking, Tate became the "cultural diplomat… of 'soft' imperialism" in the British Council's words, and the "chorus of willing intellectuals" in Said's analysis."[46]

In the context Evans writes in, the museum in question—Tate—ultimately agreed to cut their ties with BP because of a number of factors certainly including activism planned or orchestrated by *Liberate Tate* (which includes Mel Evans)[47]—though Tate explicitly said that the

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[41] Evans, 6-7.
[42] Evans, 31.
[43] Evans, 109.
[44] Note that while the AGA does not claim explicitly to represent the public interest, the fact that their annual reports are titled "report to the community," certainly suggests they see themselves as accountable in some way to a community.
[45] Evans, 109.
[46] Evans, 130.
[47] Evans, 1-5; Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, (London, UK: Verso, 2016), 197-199.

activism did not have any impact.[48] While in my research I have not come across activism comparable in scale or effect regarding the contestation of oil sponsorship at the AGA, the topic is not totally ignored in Canada: "When the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers [(CAPP)] struck a deal with the Canadian Museum of Civilization [(renamed the Canadian Museum of History)], MP Marjolain Boutin-Sweet—who previously worked as a museums guide in Montreal—challenged the parliament: 'is it now the mission of our museums to promote the oil lobby?'"[49] Artistic resistance has also occurred in some instances, for example, "when the Museum of Civilization [(now, History)] in Gatineau, Québec announced it would accept funds from the [CAPP] an unlikely objector set up camp outside the Gatineau museum holding a placard reading "CAPP pollutes snow" which turned out to be the material out of which the figure had been made."[50] When it comes to her take on the Canadian context, Evans does not mince words:

> In Canada local and global companies vie for entry into the tar sands, using sponsorships to build cultural capital as part of their endeavor. The licensing season sees state oil companies from Norway and China launch courtships of civil servants in parallel. Statoil sponsors the Calgary Stampede… and the Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) [7.23% owner of Syncrude in 2019[51]] has set up several sponsorship deals. CNOOC supports the University of Alberta Museum, holds the position of title sponsor in Calgary's Central Library's planned redevelopment, and sponsored a special exhibition 'The Forbidden City' to bring exhibits that had never left the Beijing Palace Museum to the Vancouver Arts Gallery.[52]

Thus, for Evans, artwashing is already a phenomenon in Canada. This paper, and chapter four in particular, will therefore add to this literature through a specific study of the AGA and the extent to which it accepts sponsorship from Syncrude to fund programing and exhibitions.

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[48] Nadia Khomani, "BP to end Tate sponsorship after 26 years," *The Guardian* March 11 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/11/bp-to-end-tate-sponsorship-climate-protests

[49] Bruce Cheadle, "Museum of Civilisation Taps Big Oil to help fund Canada's 150th Birthday," *Huffington Post,* 25 November 2013, quoted in Evans, 47.

[50] Evans, 154.

[51] Syncrude, "Ownership & Investors," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/our-company/ownership-and-investors/

[52] Evans, 28.

Conclusion

The prevalence of corporate sponsorship of art is a phenomenon tied to increases in government austerity since the late 1970s across and affecting many countries under the broader aegis of “Thatcherism,” “Reaganomics,” or the “Washington Consensus,” a phenomenon today commonly referred to as neoliberalism or market fundamentalism within academic literature. In the Canadian case federal funding for arts in Canada began to decrease substantially “[i]n 1985, [when] the Edmonton Art Gallery [(the earlier incarnation of the AGA)] saw its federal support drop from $191,000 to $59,000 in the span of a single year due to the change to a quarterly project-by-project granting system.”[53] The result has been that “[a]s federal funding of the arts decreases, gallery administrations become more reliant on the private sector.”[54] The outcome of such a change has been increased reliance on corporate funds at the AGA and accordingly, I therefore hypothesize that the path has been paved for artwashing to be quite extensive at the AGA. In an effort to test this hypothesis, as well as some additional expectations of how sponsorship functions at the AGA, chapter four will summarize my findings from researching through the AGA’s annual reports since 1982 to determine the magnitude, form and movement of Syncrude’s sponsorship over the period from 1982-2017.

[53] Eggert, 40.
[54] Eggert, 38.

Chapter 4

Previous chapters have established justifications for how I expect Syncrude's sponsorship at the AGA to look and function. I expect to find the following:

i) A base level of sponsorship from Syncrude to the AGA that changes along with incidents harmful to Syncrude's broader image.

ii) Syncrude's sponsorship is focused disproportionately on artists that are local to Syncrude's extractive operations in northern Alberta.

iii) Syncrude's sponsorship is focused disproportionately on content that is local to their extractive operations in northern Alberta.

Findings

A main finding of this work is inconsistent with my expectation that sponsorship at the AGA would change as political controversies (like the dead ducks of 2008) unfold that highlight Syncrude's environmentally destructive—or in the case of the ducks, simply negligent—policies. Through examining the AGA's annual reports, and those of its predecessor, the Edmonton Art Gallery (EAG), dating back to 1982, I have found that Syncrude's sponsorship to the AGA/EAG has been relatively static, though changes in form have taken place over time. Acute incidents (from the perspective of the tar sands industry) such as the duck incident of 2008, or then-Premier Stelmach's 2007 proposed royalty changes—described as 'egregious' by tar sands insiders[1]— are managed differently than the long-term curation of culture which artwashing seeks to accomplish. In the case of the 2007 royalty review, when the tar sands industry was

[1] Urquhart, 188.

faced with a surprise that threatened, in an acute way, the status-quo, lobbying was the primary method used.[2]

By changes in form, I mean that Syncrude has been a donor and/or sponsor of the AGA in one way or another since at least 1982—though the form of their sponsorship (how and what they give money to) has varied over this time period. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, would-be corporate donors could and would give money to the EAG through purchasing a corporate membership in a tiered system, at different times becoming “life members” and/or “president’s circle” members. Pricing for the president’s circle is three-tiered with “patrons” donating $10,000 and up, “sustainers” donating $5,000-$9,999, and with “participants” donating $1,000-$4,999.[3] The president’s circle membership was marketed by the EAG as an elite membership.[4] President’s circle members were often credited publicly for sponsoring/funding exhibitions.[5] Further, the president’s circle is given credit in many EAG publications, as being one of approximately nine funding bodies making EAG programming possible.[6] Effectively, a corporation could become a member of the president’s circle through purchasing a corporate membership within the relevant tiered system, and become indirectly credited for their sponsorship through the “funded by” sections of many exhibitions or credited as a supporter of the EAG’s general programming. Importantly, under this model, which appears to last until

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[2] Urquhart, 188-194.
[3] Edmonton Art Gallery, “Annual Report 1997,” (Edmonton, 1997), 15.
[4] Eggert, 45-46.
[5] Kidd and Tim Nowlin, “Recent Work by Robert Scott: 1987-1993,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1993), 1; Elizabeth Kidd, “Florence Mortimer: Pioneer & Painter,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1993), 1; Elizabeth Kidd and Kitty Scott, “Re-viewing Modernism: Abstract Painting and Prints from the Gallery’s Collections: 1930-1990,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1992), 1.
[6] Elizabeth Kidd and Tim Nowlin, “Recent Work by Robert Scott: 1987-1993,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1993), 20; Joan Borsa, Elizabeth Kidd, and Kitty Scott, “Notions of home: Ross Muirhead, Ann Newdigate, Joanne Tod,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1993), 2; Elizabeth Kidd, “Florence Mortimer: Pioneer & Painter,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1993), 24; Nell Tenhaaf, “Mary Scott: In me more than me,” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1993), 2; Bruce Greenville, “Tanya Rusnak: O Emigratsii (on emigration),” (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1997), 13.

around 1995,[7] corporations were not individually pointed to as being responsible for a specific event or exhibition. This changed after 1995.

From the beginning of my dataset (starting in 1982) Syncrude was a member of the President's Circle, but in 1994 they are not found listed as a president's circle member and yet continue to be listed as a sponsor;[8] in 1995, they become "Gallery members;"[9] and in 1996, Syncrude membership changes again to the category of "life member" under the specific sub-category of sponsorship called 'patron.'[10] Further, in 1996 Syncrude sponsored the cost of admissions for the public from June 28-July 12 of 1996.[11] The year 1996 therefore marks the first change in form to Syncrude's AGA sponsorship. Prior to 1996, their sponsorship was relatively quiet in that they donated to a large pool of money with many others, which then funded many things (though Syncrude did not often, if ever, get explicitly named in these cases). But this changes in 1996. Then Syncrude starts to sponsor specific exhibitions and specific events such that Syncrude is named as being a part of the effort making the exhibitions possible, and more significantly, is credited with making the gallery accessible to the public[12] (because in 1983 the EAG began charging admission fees for non-EAG-members).[13]

In 2005, Syncrude's sponsorship once again shifts forms. Syncrude becomes a (minority) sponsor of the Alberta Foundations for the Arts' (AFA) Travelling Exhibitions (TREX) program.[14] The goal of the TREX program is to "ensure every Albertan is provided with an opportunity to enjoy fully developed exhibitions in schools, libraries, health care centres and

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[7] Edmonton Art Gallery, "1995 Annual Report," (Edmonton, 1995).
[8] Edmonton Art Gallery, "1994 Annual Report," (Edmonton, 1994), 12.
[9] Edmonton Art Gallery, "1995 Annual Report" (Edmonton, 1995).
[10] Edmonton Art Gallery, "1996 Annual Report," (Edmonton, 1996), 15-16.
[11] Edmonton Art Gallery, "1996 Annual Report," 15.
[12] Edmonton Art Gallery, "1996 Annual Report," 15.
[13] Eggert, 42.
[14] Shane Golby, email message to author, May 2, 2019.

smaller rural institutions and galleries throughout the province."[15] According to Shane Golby, manager and curator of the TREX program, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA),funds 95% of the TREX program. It is responsible for developing three exhibitions per year[16] that then travel around Alberta as they are booked by organizations looking to host an exhibit.[17] As is indicated explicitly and visibly under Syncrude's logo on the AGA's TREX webpage, "Syncrude supports the development of Indigenous exhibitions for TREX in Northeast and North Central Alberta."[18] Indeed, as Golby informed me, since 2005 Syncrude's sponsorship of the TREX program has funded a fourth exhibition and the shipping costs resulting from it. Based on annual reports, the content of this fourth exhibition is consistently produced by First Nations artists.[19] The AGA makes this connection explicit: "As our corporate *partner*, Syncrude Canada *enables* the AGA to continue producing First Nations artist exhibitions each year."[20] In fact, this exact line appears in the annual reports of 2007 – 2015, excluding 2011.[21] (the exact line is displayed in paragraph 3 of image 1.0). To enable is to give the authority, or the means, necessary to do something; thus, Syncrude is necessary to the production of "First Nations artist exhibitions"[22] in

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[15] Alberta Foundation for the Arts, "AFA Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX)," (Alberta Foundation for the Arts, 2018), last accessed July 01, 2019, https://www.affta.ab.ca/trex .
[16] Shane Golby, email message to author, May 2, 2019.
[17] Art Gallery of Alberta, "AFA Travelling Exhibitions (TREX)," (Art Gallery of Albreta, 2019), last accessed July 01, 2019, https://www.youraga.ca/exhibitions/afa-travelling-exhibitions-trex .
[18] Art Gallery of Alberta, "AFA Travelling Exhibitions (TREX)," (Art Gallery of Albreta, 2019), last accessed July 01, 2019, https://www.youraga.ca/exhibitions/afa-travelling-exhibitions-trex .
[19] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2012,", (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2012), 10; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2013," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2013), 11; Art Gallery of Alberta "Report to the Community, 2014," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2014), 11; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2015," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2015), 18.
[20] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the community, 2012" (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2012), 10, emphasis added.
[21] Art Gallery of Alberta , "Report to the Community, 2007" (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2007), 11; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2008," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2008), 15; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2009," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2009), 16; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2010," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2010), 18; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2012" (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2012), 10; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2013), (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2013), 11; Art Gallery of Alberta "Report to the Community, 2014," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2014), 11; Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2015," (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2015), 18.
[22] This is the wording in all the annual reports (reports to the community) of 2007, 11; 2008, 15; 2012, 10; 2013, 11; 2014, 11; 2015, 18.

the TREX program. Such a relationship is consistent with the broader image Syncrude seeks to curate for itself as a champion of Indigenous peoples,[23] with for example, the "oft repeated claim, that [Syncrude is] the largest employer of Aboriginals in Canada."[24] Moreover, such an image is likely desirable for Syncrude as a tar sands company because of widely-held stereotypical understandings of Indigenous peoples by settler audiences as 'stewards of the land.' Thus, to have the involvement of Indigenous peoples in not only their workforce—which Syncrude will let you know is about 10% Indigenous peoples[25]—but also in the art they sponsor, signals to settler audiences that they have, at least, the tacit consent of the stewards of the land. Such is one admittedly cynical but not altogether unlikely interpretation of the work being accomplished through Syncrude's "partnership" with the TREX program.

In addition to the financial sponsorship, the "content" associated with Syncrude's sponsorship, as exemplified by their sponsorship of the woodlands exhibition referenced in the epitaph at the beginning of chapter three, paints a very positive picture of the boreal forest. Skillfully painted acrylic on canvas depicts the animal life typical of the boreal forest in their normal environment—a deer in the woods, a buffalo on the plains, a loon on water.[26] Judging by those works only, you would not know that Syncrude was in the business of strip mining.

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[23]Ian Urquhart, 154-155; For example, see Syncrude's sponsorship at Royal Alberta Museum, https://royalalbertamuseum.ca/about/history/; for a discussion of RAM sponsorship see Frits Pannekoek, "Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture, Provincial Museum of Alberta (Review)," *The Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (June 2001): 348-349; see also the content in the *Pathways magazine, Syncrude's Aboriginal Review* 2010-2018, https://www.syncrude.ca/our-news/pathways-magazine/

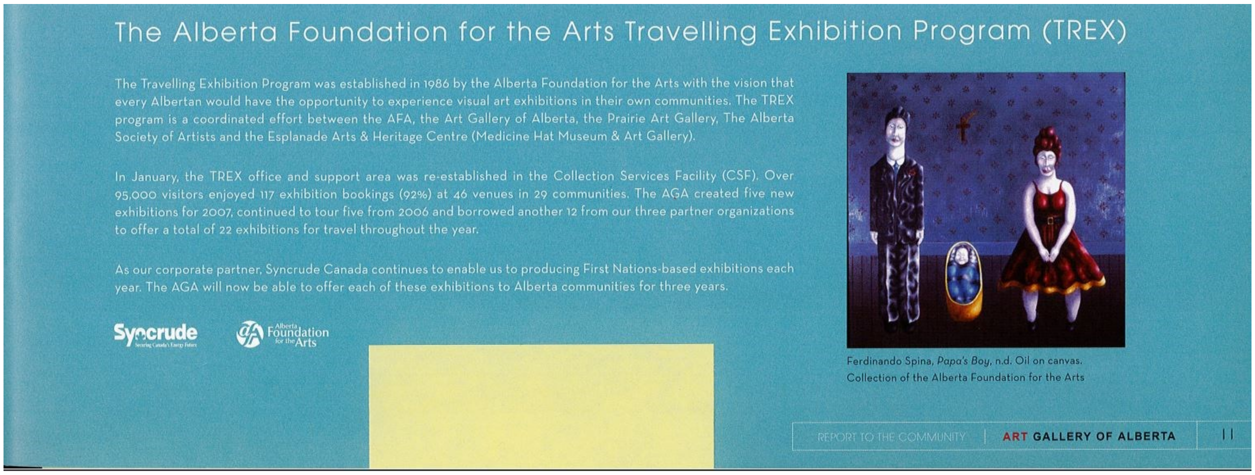
[24] Kirsten, "Edmonton: Cultural Texts and Indigeneity," (blog post) 29 March 2012, last accessed July 1 2019, http://culturaltextsandindigeneity.blogspot.com/2012/03/syncrude-gallery-at-royal-alberta.html.

[25] Syncrude Canada Ltd., "Aboriginal Relations Scorecard," *Pathways: Aboriginal Review 2018,* issue no. 9, 48 ; Syncrude, "Aboriginal Relations," https://www.syncrude.ca/community/aboriginal-relations/ .

[26] AFA Travelling Exhibition Program, "TREX Interpretive Guide: "Woodlands,"" (AFA Travelling Exhibition Program), last accessed 2019-09-16, https://www.youraga.ca/sites/default/files/file/2017-10/NEW%20Woodlands%20Ed.%20Kit%20small%20filecompressed.pdf, 7-10.

With all of that said, the word choice of ‘partner’ used by the AGA is surprising and misleading; so too is the choice to place Syncrude’s logo beside the AFA’s in equal size and position (see bottom left of image 1.0).

Image 1.0


The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX)

The Travelling Exhibition Program was established in 1986 by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts with the vision that every Albertan would have the opportunity to experience visual art exhibitions in their own communities. The TREX program is a coordinated effort between the AFA, the Art Gallery of Alberta, the Prairie Art Gallery, The Alberta Society of Artists and the Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre (Medicine Hat Museum & Art Gallery).

In January, the TREX office and support area was re-established in the Collection Services Facility (CSF). Over 95,000 visitors enjoyed 117 exhibition bookings (92%) at 46 venues in 29 communities. The AGA created five new exhibitions for 2007, continued to tour five from 2006 and borrowed another 12 from our three partner organizations to offer a total of 22 exhibitions for travel throughout the year.

As our corporate partner, Syncrude Canada continues to enable us to producing First Nations-based exhibitions each year. The AGA will now be able to offer each of these exhibitions to Alberta communities for three years.

Syncrude

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Ferdinando Spina, *Papa's Boy*, n.d. Oil on canvas.
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY | ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA | 11

This image is taken from AGA Annual Report 2007, 11.

Shane Golby has indicated to me that while Syncrude does fund the fourth exhibition described above, the AFA funds 95% of the TREX program.[27] Adding to my confusion, Eggert describes Syncrude’s sponsorship as “arguably essential to both the gallery and the government, as it allowed the Art Gallery of Alberta to facilitate the program, providing other communities in the province with the opportunity to display its travelling exhibits.”[28] Based on Golby’s information, I believe the AGA’s description of Syncrude as a partner is wildly misleading. This likely leads academics, like Eggert, to mistakenly characterize Syncrude’s sponsorship as “essential.” Such a mischaracterization by the AGA is interesting, however, because it renders Syncrude

[27] Shane Golby, email message to author, May 2, 2019.
[28] Eggert, 64.

necessary—indeed, essential—to the production of "First Nations artist exhibitions each year."[29] That is, while Syncrude's financial contribution to TREX is relatively minor (at about 5 percent), it is made to appear as though their sponsorship is on par with the AFA's—through its logo sharing the same size as the AFA's and through language like 'partner'—when there is in fact a factor of twenty that separates the different organizations' contributions.

While Syncrude's sponsorship at the AGA therefore does not appear to vary along with perceptions of their corporate image, it is clear that their AGA sponsorship helps in fostering a broader image as an enabler of Indigenous ways of life. Examples of this broader image are not hard to find: *Pathways* magazine, for example, repeatedly, and not-so-subtly, makes the case for the positive impact of Syncrude on Indigenous communities and ways of life geographically close to their operations.[30]Further, in *Pathways,* Syncrude frames itself as an accountable community member through "provid[ing] an update on Syncrude's performance in areas of interest to local communities."[31] One such update present in every issue of the magazine is the "Aboriginal Relations Scorecards" which communicates statistics like Aboriginal representation in Syncrude's workforce.[32] Furthermore, each issue of the magazine also presents an "Environment update," which often names tailings management as a success story or as some kind of commitment.[33] Environmental events are highlighted with titles like "Cleaning Up Skies," "Boreal Builders," and "Lessons from the Earth."[34] Accordingly, while I have argued that Syncrude's AGA sponsorship cannot be thought of as responsive to incidents like the duck

[29] Art Gallery of Alberta, 2012, 10; 2013, 11; 2014, 11; 2015, 18.
[30]See for example, Syncrude Canada Ltd., *Pathways: Syncrude Canada Ltd. Aboriginal Review*, 2010-2018,
[31] Syncrude, "Pathways Magazine," last accessed July 2 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/our-news/pathways-magazine/ .
[32] Syncrude Canada Ltd., *Pathways: Syncrude Canada Ltd. Aboriginal Review*, 2010-2018
[33] Syncrude Canada Ltd., *Pathways: Syncrude Canada Ltd. Aboriginal Review*, 2010-2018
[34] Syncrude Canada Ltd., *Pathways: Syncrude Canada Ltd. Aboriginal Review*, (2010): 25, 36, 38.

incident described in chapter one, this brief look at *Pathways* is meant to illustrate that when the scope of inquiry is broadened, it can be argued that Syncrude has been responsive to issues of public perception like the duck incident, though these responses have not manifested in sponsorship at the AGA.

Evans' work examined in detail in chapter 3, argues that "[a] pattern emerges threading regional arts centres with local sites of extraction in some parts, and knitting together blockbuster museums with financial and political hubs on other shores. Big Oil's allegiance with the arts is now a global phenomenon."[35] Further, Evans suggests that we should expect oil companies to collect or sponsor "exhibitions in the places the company extracts oil."[36] As was suggested in chapter 3, such sponsorship "at first aims to secure brokerage of deals, but all too often it becomes an attempt to rebuild trust following an accident or opposition."[37]Consistent with Evans' suggestions, Syncrude's sponsorship appears predominantly located close to their sites of extraction. These are the locations most likely to be affected by extraction and production, as well as be potential sites of accidents fostering focused opposition (as occurred in 2008 for instance), and therefore, most likely to resist and/or oppose Syncrude's operations and expansions.[38] From their community investment webpage, Syncrude writes in large bold lettering: "We donate on average $6 million annually to community organizations and initiatives."[39] In terms of what kinds of projects they give to, Syncrude is again explicit (there are more criteria than listed here, for all see appendix 1):

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[35] Evans, 26.
[36] Evans, 26.
[37] Evans, 28.
[38] Jason Koebler, "Local Protesters are Killing Big Oil and Mining Projects Worldwide, *Motherboard (Vice)*, 12 May 2014, quoted in Evans, 85.
[39] Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .

> Organizations or events dealing with the environment and health and safety[;] [c]ommunity development projects that enhance community facilities and activities. Projects must be self-supporting in the future and reflect the needs and interest of a wide number of people (*within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only*)[;] Arts and culture projects or organizations such as theater, concerts, film and exhibition that further the arts, entertain or inform (*within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only*)[;] Recreational projects that promote health and fitness and organizations promoting amateur sports (*within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only*)[;] Science and technology projects or organizations that encourage partnerships and promote oil sands technology.[40]

Criteria for organizations that will receive this support are also laid out (and are detailed in appendix 2). This criterion seems especially important: "[t]he relationship to the oil sands industry, *ability to encourage broad public support for Syncrude*[.]"[41]

Syncrude's goals with community investment—which includes their sponsorship of the AGA[42]—are far from neutral, or better yet, authentic. They clearly hope to contribute mainly to the Wood Buffalo region or in ways that "promote oil sands technology," and/or "encourage broad public support for Syncrude." The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is made up of Fort McMurray and nine rural communities.[43] Within its boundaries are most tar sands operations in Alberta, certainly including Syncrude's.[44] Thus, Syncrude's sponsorship at the AGA ought to be understood as part of a broader strategy to build broad public support for Syncrude operations and expansions. While Syncrude's priorities are clearly focused in the Wood Buffalo region, their sponsorship at the AGA can be partly understood within Evans' framework as part of Syncrude's connection between its zone of extraction and one of the

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[40] Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .
[41] Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ , emphasis added.
[42] Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .
[43] Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, "Our Communities," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.rmwb.ca/living/Communities.htm,
[44] Oil Sands Developers Group, "Athabasca Oil Sands Projects," last accessed July 1 2019, http://www.fortmcmurraytourism.com/sites/default/files/pdf-documents/oil-sand-map.pdf

relevant political hubs. Syncrude's support does however appear to vary in magnitude depending on the proximity of recipients to their extractive operations.[45]

Beyond Syncrude

While Syncrude has certainly been the focus of this project, as has been previously pointed out, Syncrude is not properly thought of as a company in a typical sense. Instead, Syncrude remains a conglomerate whose ownership complexion has changed over time.[46] Throughout the joint venture's existence Imperial Oil (that owns Esso[47]; ExxonMobil in turn owns a controlling share of Imperial Oil[48]) has been a constant owner. It began with a 30% share in Syncrude in 1965 and reduced that share to 25% in 1982. It retains that ownership percentage today.[49] In the context of AGA, Imperial Oil is an independent sponsor, separate from its sponsorship through Syncrude. Imperial Oil has been listed as a life member under the category of "patron"—though interestingly never joining the President's Circle—since at least 1982.[50] In addition to playing this relatively quiet donor role, Imperial Oil has been sponsoring a "school tour program" since at least 2002.[51] In 2002, through the school tour, "the gallery hosted 3788 school students accompanied by 305 adults on guided tours."[52] By 2010, the program had grown

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[45] Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .
[46] Daily Oil Bulletin Infographic, "Reshaping a Giant: Syncrude Ownership 1965-2015," last modified October 5, 2015, https://www.dailyoilbulletin.com/supplement/daily-infographic/2015/10/5/reshaping-giant-syncrude-ownership-1965-2015/#sthash.2RNmvTnP.dpbs
[47] Imperial Oil, "Our History," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.imperialoil.ca/en-ca/company/about/history/our-history?sc_lang=en-CA .
[48] J. William Carpenter, "Top 5 Companies Owned by Exxon Mobil (XOM)," *Investopedia*, last modified October 13, 2015, last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.investopedia.com/articles/markets/101315/top-5-companies-owned-exxon-mobil.asp .
[49] Daily Oil Bulletin Infographic, "Reshaping a Giant: Syncrude Ownership 1965-2015," last modified October 5, 2015, https://www.dailyoilbulletin.com/supplement/daily-infographic/2015/10/5/reshaping-giant-syncrude-ownership-1965-2015/#sthash.2RNmvTnP.dpbs
[50] Edmonton Art Gallery, "Annual Report 1982."
[51] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2002," 13.
[52] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2002," 13.

substantially hosting "14,546 students in 617 school programs."[53] Additionally, in 2007 Imperial Oil donated between 250,000-500,000 CAD to the "New Vision Capital Campaign"[54] which was the fundraising campaign for the AGA's new (now, current) building.[55]

As detailed in chapter 2, the Alberta government was also involved in Syncrude through its investment in Syncrude and through the Alberta Energy Company (AEC). The AEC was quasi-public initially, owned by government and private shareholders until government shares were sold off in 1993.[56] From at least 1983 until 1994, the AEC, like Syncrude, was a member of the President's Circle.[57]

Other oil and gas companies are sponsors of the AGA. The Interprovincial Pipeline Company, for example, has been a consistent sponsor at the AGA. Now known as Enbridge, in 2018 it began to sponsor certain TREX programs—specifically, in towns and communities that are considered "right-of-way" communities.[58] In this context, right-of-way communities are those with a pipeline running through them. Right of way communities, like sites of extraction, are those most likely to revoke some kind of social license due to accidents or opposition, therefore, similarly to the Syncrude case, these communities are the communities Enbridge is interested in sponsoring art to. Once again then, the TREX program expands through the generous funding of pipeline corporations.

[53] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2010," 17.
[54] Art Gallery of Alberta, "Report to the Community, 2007."
[55] Art Gallery of Alberta, "New Vision Timeline," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.youraga.ca/sites/default/files/file/2017-06/New-Vision-Timeline.pdf .
[56] John Boyko, "Encana" *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified January 18, 2018, last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/encana .
[57] Edmonton Art Gallery, "Annual Reports 1982," (Edmonton, 1982), through Edmonton Art Gallery, "Annual Reports 1994," (Edmonton, 1994).
[58]Art Gallery of Alberta, "AFA Travelling Exhibitions (TREX)," (Art Gallery of Albreta, 2019), last accessed July 01, 2019, https://www.youraga.ca/exhibitions/afa-travelling-exhibitions-trex .

As Nikiforuk demonstrates, such an approach is found elsewhere in Alberta, beyond the parameters of art galleries. In Rosebud, Alberta, in a somewhat different context, water was fouled and literally at risk of exploding because of an incredible amount of methane contaminating it from Encana's hydraulic fracturing operations (aka fracking).[59] In this case, opposition began to build after farm buildings exploded, hospitalizing three men, and the scientific perseverance of Jessica Ernst.[60] Ernst testified to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in Ottawa where she explained some of the very notable risks of unregulated hydraulic fracturing: " 'We are told that only nitrogen is used [for fracking], so our water is safe because nitrogen comes from the air,' she continued. She then showed the committee a list of fracking chemicals from *Oilweek* magazine. 'Some of them contain diesel and mineral oil. In Alberta, the regulator does not require industry to disclose any of the chemicals used, not even if they're toxic, not even if it's benzene, a known carcinogen, or toluene, which damages the brain, notably in children. Toluene was found in our [Rosebud] water.' "[61]

While such a testimony, given in 2007, seems damning, "[b]ack in Rosebud, more and more people regarded Ernst's outspokenness as a threat to Encana's promised funding for the Rosebud Theatre."[62] In 2004, Encana—the company doing the hydraulic fracturing—promised the Rosebud theatre $150,000, "as Ernst put it—'to not only divide and conquer but to buy people's silence.' "[63] The connection being made here is familiar: the arts expand because of the generosity of oil corporations. Thus, while industry, Alberta and the regulator worked together

[59] Andrew Nikiforuk, *Slick Water: Fracking and One Insider's Stand Against the World's Most Powerful Industry*, (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2015), 159, 160, 182.
[60] Nikiforuk, *Slick Water*, 159, 160, 180.
[61] Nikiforuk, *Slick Water,* 181.
[62] Nikiforuk, *Slick Water,* 182.
[63] Nikiforuk *Slick Water* quoting Ernst, 160.

through the Alberta Research Council to tell the people of Rosebud, in 2008, that the problems Ernst and other had pointed to were due to "either nature or unhygienic landowners,"[64] the community was largely onside with the hydraulic fracturing—some going so far as leaving "[a]busive voicemail messages left on [Ernst's] phone [telling Ernst] to shut up because everyone loved Encana's money."[65] All of this is to show that sponsorship has a very tangible impact especially in communities most affected by oil companies. Such sponsorship is far from benign.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown, at the very least, that artistic sponsorships stemming from oil corporations—particularly Syncrude but others as well—fit within these corporations' broader interests of having a mechanism – artistic sponsorship – that can assist in their public relations campaigns. Such a finding, while admittedly uncontroversial, is consistent with the broader and less contextually specific literature examining the corporate sponsorship and collection of art. As Wu finds in the U.K and U.S contexts, corporate justifications for sponsoring and collecting art are numerous: as a form of decoration that appreciates in value,[66] to fulfil a recruitment function,[67] to boost employee morale,[68] as a public relations tool[69] and/or as a financial investment.[70] Through a combination of interviews and surveys targeting employees and corporate collecting CEOs, Wu finds that many of the explicit justifications given for corporate collecting by corporate collectors—like improving employee morale[71]—are exaggerated and

[64] Nikiforuk, *Slick Water,* 185.
[65] Nikiforuk, *Slick Water,* 182.
[66] Wu, *Privatising Culture,* 248.
[67] Wu, *Privatising Culture,* 250.
[68] Wu, *Privatising Culture,* 246.
[69] Wu, *Privatising Culture,*248, 263, 269.
[70] Wu, *Privatising Culture,* 248, 269.
[71] Wu, *Privatising Culture,*246.

instead, "the most attractive quality of corporate art collecting [is] as a valuable investment in itself and as a P[ublic] R[elations] tool."[72] Extending Wu's analysis from collection to sponsorship, this thesis adds to the weight of Wu's claim. Syncrude's sponsorship and community investment portfolio, and by extension, those of other tar sands corporations (and perhaps all oil corporations), must be understood as part of their broader strategy to curate a culture—sometimes described as a "petroculture"[73]—to maximize their interests. Syncrude's artistic sponsorship is part of its broader community investment portfolio which is a six million dollar annual budget.[74] Within this larger budget AGA sponsorship is in the realm of 15,000 CAD annually to the TREX program plus any additional exhibition or program sponsorship they may do as a one off in a given year. Thus, while I have shown in chapter four that Syncrude's sponsorship of art and artistic programming at the AGA is properly understood as "artwashing," this artwashing is only a cog in a far larger machine geared towards affecting public opinion in ways that are favourable to Syncrude's bottom line. Indeed, Syncrude's efforts are not focused primarily at the AGA standing in stark contrast to BP's strategy at Tate museum in the U.K context as studied by Evans;[75] instead, Syncrude's efforts, which certainly include artwashing though extend beyond it as well, are focused in locations with greater proximity to their operations than Edmonton. A brief look at their much larger annual six-million-dollar community investment portfolio reveals this much quite clearly.[76]

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[72] Wu, *Privatising Culture,*269.
[73] See for example, Meenal Shrivastava, "Perils of Petroculture in a Neoliberal Resource Economy," in *Contemporary Inequalities and Social Justice in Canada*, ed. Janine Brodie, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 127-142.
[74]Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .
[75] Evans, 103-160.
[76]Syncrude, "Community Investment Program," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .

Consistent with Evans' theorization, such a sponsorship pattern exists as the most important opinions for Syncrude to sway are found closest to their sites of extraction. The most important opinions to convey for Syncrude are those more likely to be directly affected by their operations than folks in Edmonton. As it is these folks, in areas like Fort McMurray and the Wood Buffalo Region, who could pose the most serious opposition to further expansion and development of the tar sands due to the ways in which accidents tend to focus and heighten opposition. Comparable evidence is found with Enbridge's sponsorship choices: Only in "right of way" cities (i.e., those cities with pipelines running through citizens' properties).[77] In Syncrude's case, the lesson learned is that while art gallery sponsorship was not as prominent as I expected, the local involvement in and around the Woof Buffalo Regional Municipality is more important.

Questions and Further Sites of Research

(1) If sponsorship is seen as problematic, at least in the cases of it coming from the tar sands, then how can this be resisted? I think it probably must happen at the sites of sponsorship at the community level. For in the AB case, I think the bitumen triangle holds too much sway to think governmental policies would have anything to do with being the solution.

This thesis has established that something is certainly being accomplished through artwashing—namely, the curation of a type of culture that is symbiotic with tar sands extraction. If readers are convinced as I am that such artwashing, as well as broader investments in communities, that aim at securing tacit consent, are in fact problematic and worthy of resisting, then one may be wondering from where resistance should flow? Remembering Urquhart's analysis of the

[77] Enbridge, "Understanding the right-of-way," last accessed July 1 2019, https://www.enbridge.com/projects-and-infrastructure/public-awareness/understanding-the-right-of-way .

"bitumen triangle," recall that the provincial government, tar sands industrial players (like Syncrude), and several universities in Alberta, work together to manage and promote the tar sands image in and beyond Alberta's borders. Accordingly, efforts demanding answers through the power of public policy are probably misled. Instead, I suspect, and future research is warranted in fleshing this out, that resistance will have to come from those sites most proximal to the extraction projects. How this resistance looks and is manifested is an open question but it is clear to me, replacements to tar sands-laced community funding are going to be necessary so as to avoid forcing people to chose between a thriving community and accepting tar sands money.

(2) While tobacco and armament sponsors were replaced largely, much of the replacements occurred through oil corporations stepping in. If as oil corporations are increasingly marginalized as climate change becomes more violently unignorable, I suspect we might see similar bans in the future. It should be assumed that their replacement will likely be only slightly less socially marginalized. There is not an easy answer to where the money comes from.

Relatedly, Evans points out that in many cases the sponsors that followed after tobacco and armament actually increased the amounts sponsored. However, as Evans is careful to point out, many of the follow-up sponsors to tobacco and armament were oil corporations. Research is required in determining whether this kind of pattern is common. That is, is sponsorship most beneficial to those industries on the social margins of acceptance? Because if so, then it should not be expected that the sponsors following oil sponsors will be any more socially well-positioned.

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Appendix 1

Syncrude's Description of what kinds of assistance they provide. Taken from https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ .

"How we provide assistance:

We may provide assistance in the form of funds, materials/equipment or employees' time and expertise for projects that fall within these categories:

- Education and lifelong learning projects which can't be funded by local school boards and/or institutions of higher learning.
- Organizations or events dealing with the environment and health and safety.
- Community development projects that enhance community facilities and activities. Projects must be self-supporting in the future and reflect the needs and interests of a wide number of people (within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only).
- Arts and culture projects or organizations such as theatre, concerts, film and exhibitions that further the arts, entertain or inform (within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only).
- Recreational projects that promote health and fitness and organizations promoting amateur sports (within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only).
- Science and technology projects or organizations that encourage partnerships and promote oil sands technology." (Syncrude, 2019).

Appendix 2

Syncrude's Selection Criteria, taken from https://www.syncrude.ca/community/community-investment/ **.**

"Selection Criteria

Syncrude considers a number of criteria when selecting community investment projects, including:

- Privately-initiated projects or programs (rather than government-funded)
- Potential benefit to the community and community support
- The applicant's contributions to the project
- The applicant's initiative, planning, assessment of community need and collaborations with other organizations
- Support from multi-stakeholder groups
- Relationship to the oil sands industry, ability to encourage broad public support for Syncrude and opportunity for our employees to use their talents and expertise
- Sound and measurable objectives, a well-planned approach and a high probability of producing meaningful, positive results
- Financial need based on assessment of past revenue sources and use of funds
- One-time contributions are favoured over recurring needs but long term, multi-year projects are considered based on significant corporate exposure and enduring benefits
- Other criteria may also be considered" (Syncrude, 2019).